VOLUME 1
NUMBER 4
MAY 1950

OTHER WORLDS Science Stories

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OTHER WORLDS
SCIENCE STORIES

May 1950

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DEAR DEVIL
By ERIC FRANK RUSSELL



S. J. BYRNE • JEROME BIXBY
A. E. VAN VOGT • RAYMOND F. JONES



Star, Warner Anderson; *Interviewer*, Forrest Ackerman; *Author*, Robert Heinlein

DESTINATION MOON

In the following scenes we are taken on a "trip tease" to 1960 and view a portion of Hollywood's flight to our satellite in the soon to be released Geo. Pa technicolor production, DESTINATION MOON, adapted from the novel by Robert Heinlein "Rocket Ship *Galileo*." Scientifilm authority Forrest Ackerman takes us on a tour of inspection. A preview of things to come!



Radarman Dick Wesson, his features distorted by 6 gravities.



The rocketeers begin to free themselves from their acceleration couches.

Turn to inside back cov

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Cover painting by Malcolm Smith

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EDITORIAL

IF YOU can take your eyes off the BEM on the cover (with which we defy one of our own taboos—because *this* is the first *strictly legit* BEM ever to appear on a science fiction cover), we'll let you in on a newsy item. The lad in sweet repose in the "devil's" tentacles is artist Malcolm Smith's own son, who posed for the cover. We want to thank Daddy for a fine cover painting, and Sonny for a fine job of modeling. Talent in that there family!

Naturally this cover illustrates the best story in the issue—and no *lese majeste* intended to A. E. van Vogt whose name you'll see right down there beside that of Raymond F. Jones on the cover—*Dear Devil,* by Eric Frank Russell, who now occupies an extra tender spot in our hearts. We say this because you'll find the same soft spot after you've finished reading this story. That is, we mean you'll find the soft spot in your heart, not the story—we mean Russell'l be in it . . . such a paragraph! All we need now is an editor! Okay, we'll start all over. . .

Dear Devil is *good,* see?

Why don't we go to bed once in a while instead of fussing and fretting over this magazine like an old maid over an unconscious sailor who just fell through her skylight? Well, it must be because we're as thrilled as a kid with a new toy. Seems like success is going to our head like a balloon—or, our hat is too tight to fit our new balloon (the one we use for a head). . . See! We've got 'em again! The jitters. Or no, it's letters, not jitters. Yes, that's it, *letters.* We got 'em. You bet. And thanks.

You know, that third issue *was* pretty fair. You liked it. Outside of our darn fool mistake in putting that silly gadget on an otherwise perfect cover, and outside of putting "like" on the cover and "love" inside the book, and outside of picking the wrong story for first place (proving you readers know more than we do about it), and outside of miscounting words so we have to put the *Letters* all over the place to get 'em in at all, and outside of a dozen other things that make us wonder what we did with twelve years experience as editor, it was pretty fair. And if you're curious, your vote for best story in the issue went to *The Gamin.* Bradbury and Phillips walked off with the rest of the honors.

So, back to this issue, which we fatuously proclaim is an improvement. We say fatuous, because we freely admit from now on that we don't know what we're talking about. Think of that—we picked only one out of the first three in the issue!

Which is why we have made Beatrice Mahaffey our new managing editor! Meet Bea, who picked *Dear Devil* and then held a knife at our throat until we agreed weakly to buy it! Smart girl. Good editor. Has pushed us back in a corner (*"us,"* Ray Palmer!) and said, "I'll handle this—what do you know about *good*

stories? You got AS on the brain. You're aiming for *circulation* instead of satisfied readers."

Honest, readers, would we hire a really smart managing editor if we didn't intend to try to satisfy you? And would we then go ahead and hire *another* one, from the greatest state in the world (of which the United States is a Possession), the state of Texas, and make her associate editor? We refer to our new associate editor, Marge Sanders Budwig, who is slowly teaching your editor English.

You know, we're writing this at night, because if we did it tomorrow, she'd read it and toss it out. Then we'd have to do it over! But we gotta have some corn in the magazine, don't we? And besides, most of you know "we" so well, you'd think something happened to good old Rap if he didn't make like pink froth at a circus.

But how else can we get across how much we're enjoying putting out a magazine for *fun?* If you don't think it's fun to schedule a story like—*And All For One* by Jerome Bixby, with that (shudder) last smashing sentence (which sentence made every other editor in the field afraid to buy the story), you don't know what fun is. And how much fun do you think we got out of beating a big publishing house like Simon & Shuster to the punch with *War Of Nerves*, which is a modified version of the last chapter to A. E. van Vogt's new book, *Voyage Of The Space Beagle*, which you'll be able to buy a month or so after you've read this *Astounding* type story? *Astounding* didn't buy this one, because they never got to see it! We got there fust with the mostest! And we're going to keep on getting there fustest!

Take Ray Bradbury, for instance. He has just sold us his *best* story. *He* says so, not we—that is, we say so too, but he said it first. As a matter of fact Bleiler and Dikty have heard of it, and have requested first chance to consider the story for their 1951 anthology of the best science fiction for the year. We predict they'll select it for publication. . .

And then comes van Vogt (again) with a story that raised a heck of an argument in our office. We said the ending needed some fixing, and Mahaffey, the *managing* editor, promised us faithfully that if one single word on that lovely last page was changed, your editor would not live to see it printed. What'samatter with that girl? Doesn't she know who her editor is? Doesn't she know that he's the guy who. . .

She says he's a colossal egotist, which obviously isn't true, as you can plainly see. We didn't *finish* that sentence! But who *did* sell twice as many science fiction magazines as any other editor in twelve years?

Guy name of Tucker writes in and asks who is Frank Patton? Seems he knew everybody in Mahaffey's Mystery except the author, and he suspects it's Charlie Tanner. Nope, it ain't. It's some other guy. Tucker must be dead, he don't know who is Frank Patton! Everybody knows he is that genius, that scintillating star in the galaxy of literary greatness, that sterling pillar of ahility, that sensational author of *Doorway To Hell* and other stories that your editor will never forget! Those are stories we would have liked to have written ourselves. . .

Rap.



DEAR DEVIL

By ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

THE FIRST Martian vessel descended upon Earth with the slow, stately fall of a grounded balloon. It did resemble a large balloon in that it was spherical and had a strange buoyancy out of keeping with its metallic construction. Beyond this superficial appearance all similarity to anything Terrestrial ceased.

There were no rockets, no crimson venturis, no external projections other than several solaradiant distorting grids which boosted the ship in any desired direction through the cosmic field. There were no observation ports. All viewing was done through a transparent band running right around the fat belly of the



Illustrated by Malcolm Smith

Terror drove fathers from their children, and love seemed lost to the Earth. But then came an octopus-armed "devil" to cradle a little boy.

sphere. The bluish, nightmarish crew were assembled behind that band, surveying the world with great multi-faceted eyes.

They gazed through the band in utter silence as they examined this world which was Terra. Even if they had been capable of speech they would have said nothing. But none among them had a talkative faculty in any sonic sense. At this quiet moment none needed it.

The scene outside was one of untrammelled desolation. Scraggy blue-green grass clung to tired ground right away to the borizon scarred by ragged mountains. Dismal bushes struggled for life here and there, some

with the pathetic air of striving to become trees as once their ancestors had been. To the right, a long, straight scar through the grass betrayed the sterile lumpiness of rocks at odd places. Too rugged and too narrow ever to have been a road, it suggested no more than the desiccating remnants of a long-gone wall. And over all this loomed a ghastly sky.

Captain Skhiva eyed his crew, spoke to them with his sign-talking tentacle. The alternative was contact-telepathy which required physical touch.

"It is obvious that we are out of luck. We could have done no worse had we landed on the empty satellite. However, it is safe to go out. Anyone who wishes to explore a little while may do so."

One of them gesticulated back at him. "Captain, don't you wish to be the first to step upon this world?"

"It is of no consequence. If anyone deems it an honor, he is welcome to it." He pulled the lever opening both air-lock doors. Thicker, heavier air crowded in and pressure went up a little. "Beware of over-exertion," he warned as they went out.

Poet Fander touched him, tentacles tip to tip as he sent his thoughts racing through their nerve-ends. "This confirms all that we saw as we approached. A stricken planet far gone in its death throes. What do you suppose caused it?"

"I have not the remotest idea. I would like to know. If it has been smitten by natural forces, what might they do to Mars?" His troubled mind sent its throb of worry up Fander's contacting tentacle. "A pity that this planet had not been farther out instead of closer in; we might then have observed the preceding phenomena from the surface of Mars. It is so difficult properly to view this one against the Sun."

"That applies still more to the next world, the misty one," observed Poet Fander.

"I know it. I am beginning to fear what we may find there. If it proves to be equally dead, then we are stalled until we can make the big jump outward."

"Which won't be in our lifetimes."

"I doubt it," agreed Captain Skhiva. "We might move fast with the help of friends. We shall be slow —alone." He turned to watch his crew writhing in various directions across the grim landscape. "They find it good to be on firm ground. But what is a world without life and beauty? In a short time they will grow tired of it."

Fander said thoughtfully, "Nevertheless, I would like to see more of it. May I take out the lifeboat?"

"You are a songbird, not a pilot," reproved Captain Skhiva. "Your function is to maintain morale by entertaining us, not to roam around in a lifeboat."

"But I know how to handle it. Every one of us was trained to handle it. Let me take it that I may see more."

"Haven't we seen enough, even before we landed? What else is there to see? Cracked and distorted roads about to dissolve into nothingness.

Ages-old cities, torn and broken, crumbling into dust. Shattered mountains and charred forests and craters little smaller than those upon the Moon. No sign of any superior life-form still surviving. Only the grass, the shrubs, and various animals, two or four-legged, that flee at our approach. Why do you wish to see more?"

"There is poetry even in death," said Fander.

"Even so, it remains repulsive." Skhiva gave a little shiver. "All right. Take the lifeboat. Who am I to question the weird workings of the non-technical mind?"

"Thank you, Captain."

"It is nothing. See that you are back by dusk." Breaking contact, he went to the lock, curled snakishly on its outer rim and brooded, still without bothering to touch the new world. So much attempted, so much done—for so poor reward.

He was still pondering it when the lifeboat soared out of its lock. Expressionlessly, his multi-faceted eyes watched the energized grids change angle as the boat swung into a curve and floated away like a little bubble. Skhiva was sensitive to futility.

The crew came back well before darkness. A few hours were enough. Just grass and shrubs and child-trees straining to grow up. One had discovered a grassless oblong that once might have been the site of a dwelling. He brought back a small piece of its foundation, a lump of perished concrete which Skhiva put by for later analysis.

Another had found a small, brown, six-legged insect, but his nerve-ends had heard it crying when he picked it up, so hastily he had put it down and let it go free. Small, clumsily moving animals had been seen hopping in the distance, but all had dived down holes in the ground before any Martian could get near. All the crew were agreed upon one thing: the silence and solemnity of a people's passing was unendurable.

Fander beat the sinking of the Sun by half a time-unit. His bubble drifted under a great, black cloud, sank to ship-level, came in. The rain started a moment later, roaring down in frenzied torrents while they stood behind the transparent band and marvelled at so much water.

After a while, Captain Skhiva told them, "We must accept what we find. We have drawn a blank. The cause of this world's condition is a mystery to be solved by others with more time and better equipment. It is for us to abandon this graveyard and try the misty planet. We will take off early in the morning."

None commented, but Fander followed him to his room, made contact with a tentacle-touch.

"One could live here, Captain."

"I am not so sure of that." Skhiva coiled on his couch, suspending his tentacles on the various limb-rests. The blue sheen of him was reflected by the back wall. "In some places are rocks emitting alpha-sparks. They are dangerous."

"Of course, Captain. But I can sense them and avoid them."

"You?" Skhiva stared up at him.

"Yes, Captain. I wish to be left here."

"What?—in this place of appalling repulsiveness?"

"It has an all-pervading air of ugliness and despair," admitted Poet Fander. "All destruction is ugly. But by accident I have found a little beauty. It heartens me. I would like to seek its source."

"To what beauty do you refer?" Skhiva demanded.

Fander tried to explain the alien in non-alien terms.

"Draw it for me," ordered Skhiva.

Fander drew it, gave him the picture, said, "There!"

Gazing at it for a long time, Skhiva handed it back, mused awhile, then spoke along the other's nerves. "We are individuals with all the rights of individuals. As an individual, I don't think that picture sufficiently beautiful to be worth the tail-tip of a domestic *arlan*. I will admit that it is not ugly, even that it is pleasing."

"But, Captain—"

"As an individual," Skhiva went on, "you have an equal right to your opinions, strange though they may be. If you really wish to stay I cannot refuse you. I am entitled only to think you a little crazy." He eyed Fander again. "When do you hope to be picked up?"

"This year, next year, sometime, never."

"It may well be never," Skhiva reminded. "Are you prepared to face that prospect?"

"One must always be prepared to face the consequences of his own actions," Fander pointed out.

"True." Skhiva was reluctant to surrender. "But have you given the matter serious thought?"

"I am a non-technical component. I am not guided by thought."

"Then by what?"

"By my desires, emotions, instincts. By my inward feelings."

Skhiva said fervently, "The twin moons preserve us!"

"Captain, sing me a song of home and play me the tinkling harp."

"Don't be silly. I have not the ability."

"Captain, if it required no more than careful thought you would be able to do it?"

"Doubtlessly," agreed Skhiva, seeing the trap but unable to avoid it.

"There you are!" said Fander pointedly.

"I give up. I cannot argue with someone who casts aside the accepted rules of logic and invents his own. You are governed by notions that defeat me."

"It is not a matter of logic or illogic," Fander told him. "It is merely a matter of viewpoint. You see certain angles; I see others."

"For example?"

"You won't pin me down that way. I can find examples. For instance, do you remember the formula for determining the phase of a series tuned circuit?"

"Most certainly."

"I felt sure you would. You are a technician. You have registered it for all time as a matter of technical utility." He paused, staring at Skhiva. "I know that formula, too. It was mentioned to me, casually, many

years ago. It is of no use to me—yet I have never forgotten it."

"Why?"

"Because it holds the beauty of rhythm. It is a poem."

Skhiva sighed and said, "I don't get it."

"One upon R into omega L minus one upon omega C," recited Fander. "A perfect hexameter." He showed his amusement as the other rocked back.

After a while, Skhiva remarked, "It could be sung. One could dance to it."

"Same with this." Fander exhibited his rough sketch. "This holds beauty. Where there is beauty there once was talent—may still be talent for all we know. Where talent abides is also greatness. In the realms of greatness we may find powerful friends. We *need* such friends."

"You win." Skhiva made a gesture of defeat. "We leave you to your self-chosen fate in the morning."

"Thank you, Captain."

That same streak of stubbornness which made Skhiva a worthy commander induced him to take one final crack at Fander shortly before departure. Summoning him to his room, he eyed the poet calculatingly.

"You are still of the same mind?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Then does it not occur to you as strange that I should be so content to abandon this planet if indeed it does hold the remnants of greatness?"

"No."

"Why not?" Skhiva stiffened slightly.

"Captain, I think you are a little afraid because you suspect what I suspect: that there was no natural disaster. They did it themselves—to themselves."

"We have no proof of it," said Skhiva uneasily.

"No, Captain." Fander posed there without desire to add more.

"*If* this is their own sad handiwork," Skhiva commented at length, "what are our chances of finding friends among people so much to be feared?"

"Poor," admitted Fander. "But that—being the product of cold thought—means little to me. I am animated by warm hopes."

"There you go again, blatantly discarding reason in favor of an idle dream. Hoping, hoping, hoping—to achieve the impossible."

Fander said, "The difficult can be done at once; the impossible takes a little longer."

"Your thoughts make my orderly mind feel lopsided. Every remark is a flat denial of something that makes sense." Skhiva transmitted the sensation of a lugubrious chuckle. "Oh, well, we live and learn." He came forward, moving closer to the other. "All your supplies are assembled outside. Nothing remains but to bid you goodby."

They embraced in the Martian manner. Leaving the lock, Poet Fander watched the big sphere shudder and glide up. It soared without sound, shrinking steadily until it was a mere dot entering a cloud. A moment later it had gone.

He remained there, looking at the cloud, for a long, long time. Then he turned his attention to the load-sled holding his supplies. Climbing onto its tiny, exposed front seat, he shifted the control which energized the flotation-grids, let it rise a few feet. The higher the rise the greater the expenditure of power. He wished to conserve power; there was no knowing how long he might need it. So at low altitude and gentle pace he let the sled glide in the general direction of the thing of beauty.

Later, he found a dry cave in the hill on which his objective stood. It took him two days of careful, cautious raying to square its walls, ceiling and floor, plus half a day with a powered fan driving out silicate dust. After that, he stowed his supplies at the back, parked the sled near the front, set up a curtaining force-screen across the entrance. The hole in the hill was now home.

Slumber did not come easily that first night. He lay within the cave, a ropey, knotted thing of glowing blue with enormous, bee-like eyes, and found himself listening for harps that played sixty million miles away. His tentacle-ends twitched in involuntary search of the telepathic-contact songs that would go with the harps, and twitched in vain. Darkness grew deep and all the world a monstrous stillness held. His hearing organs craved for the eventide flip-flop of sand-frogs, but there were no frogs. He wanted the homely drone of night beetles, but none droned. Except for once when something faraway howled its heart at the Moon, there was nothing, nothing.

In the morning he washed, ate, took out the sled and explored the site of a small town. He found little to satisfy his curiosity, no more than mounds of shapeless rubble on ragged, faintly oblong foundations. It was a graveyard of long-dead domiciles, rotting, weedy, near to complete oblivion. A view from five hundred feet up gave him only one piece of information: the orderliness of outlines showed that these people had been tidy, methodical.

But tidiness is not beauty in itself. He came back to the top of his hill and sought solace with the thing that was beauty.

His explorations continued, not systematically as Skhiva would have performed them, but in accordance with his own mercurial whims. At times he saw many animals, singly or in groups, none resembling anything Martian. Some scattered at full gallop when his sled swooped over them. Some dived into groundholes, showing a brief flash of white, absurb tails. Others, four-footed, long-faced, sharp-toothed, hunted in gangs and bayed at him in concert with harsh, defiant voices.

On the seventieth day, in a deep, shadowed glade to the north, he spotted a small group of new shapes slinking along in single file. He recognized them at a glance, knew them so well that his searching eyes sent an immediate thrill of triumph into his mind. They were ragged, dirty and no more than half grown, but the thing of beauty had told him what

they were.

Hugging the ground low, he swept around in a wide curve that brought him to the farther end of the glade. His sled sloped slightly into the drop as it entered the glade. He could see them better now, even the soiled pinkishness of their thin legs. They were moving away from him, with fearful caution, but the silence of his swoop gave them no warning.

The rearmost one of the stealthy file fooled him at the last moment. He was hanging over the side of the sled, tentacles outstretched in readiness to snatch the end one with the wild mop of yellow hair when, responding to some sixth sense, his intended victim threw itself flat. His grasp shot past a couple of feet short and he got a glimpse of frightened gray eyes two seconds before a dexterous side-tilt of the sled enabled him to make good his loss by grabbing the less wary next in line.

This one was dark-haired, a bit bigger, and sturdier. It fought madly at his holding limbs while he gained altitude. Then suddenly, realizing the queer nature of its bonds, it writhed around and looked straight at him. The result was unexpected; it closed its eyes and went completely limp.

It was still limp when he bore it into the cave, but its heart continued to beat and its lungs to draw. Laying it carefully on the softness of his bed, he moved to the cave's entrance and waited for it to recover. Eventually it stirred, sat up, gazed confusedly at the facing wall. Its black eyes moved slowly around, taking in the surroundings. Then they saw Fander. They widened tremendously and their owner began to make high-pitched, unpleasant noises as it tried to back away through the solid wall. It screamed so much, in one rising throb after another, that Fander slithered out of the cave, right out of sight, and sat in the cold winds until the noises had died down.

A couple of hours later he made cautious reappearance to offer it food, but its reaction was so swift, hysterical and heartrending that he dropped his load and hid himself as though the fear was his own. The food remained untouched for two full days. On the third, a little of it was eaten. Fander ventured within.

Although the Martian did not go near, the boy cowered away murmuring, "Devil! Devil!" His eyes were red, with dark discoloration beneath them.

"Devil!" thought Fander, totally unable to repeat the alien word, but wondering what it meant. He used his sign-talking tentacle in valiant effort to convey something reassuring. The attempt was wasted. The other watched its writhings half in fear, half with distaste, and showed complete lack of comprehension. He let the tentacle gently slither forward across the floor, hoping to make thought-contact. The other recoiled from it as from a striking snake.

"Patience," he reminded himself. "The impossible takes a little longer."

Periodically he showed himself with food and drink, and night-times he slept fitfully on the coarse, damp

grass beneath lowering skies—while the prisoner who was his guest enjoyed the softness of the bed, the warmth of the cave, the security of the force-screen.

Time came when Fander betrayed an unpoetic shrewdness by using the other's belly to estimate the ripeness of the moment. When, on the eighth day, he noted that his food-offerings were now being taken regularly, he took a meal of his own at the edge of the cave, within plain sight, and observed that the other's appetite was not spoiled. That night he slept just within the cave, close to the force-screen, and as far from the boy as possible. The boy stayed awake late, watchiog him, always watching him, but gave way to slumber in the small hours.

A fresh attempt at sign-talking brought no better results than before, and the boy still refused to touch his offered tentacle. All the same, he was gaining ground slowly. His overtures still were rejected, but with less revulsion. Gradually, ever so gradually, the Martian shape was becoming familiar, almost acceptable.

The sweet savor of success was Fander's in the middle of the next day. The boy had displayed several spells of emotional sickness during which he lay on his front with shaking body and emitted low noises while his eyes watered profusely. At such times the Martian felt strangely helpless and inadequate. On this occasion, during another attack, he took advantage of the sufferer's lack of attention and slid near enough to snatch away the box by the bed.

From the box he drew his tiny electro-harp, plugged its connectors, switched it on, touched its strings with delicate affection. Slowly he began to play, sioging an accompaoiment deep inside himself. For he had no voice with which to sing out loud. but the harp sang it for him. The boy ceased his quiverings, sat up, all his attention upon the dexterous play of the tentacles and the music they conjured forth. And when he judged that at last the listener's mind was captured, Fander ceased with easy, quietening strokes, gently offered him the harp. The boy registered interest and reluctance. Careful not to move nearer, not an inch nearer, Fander offered it at full tentacle length. The boy had to take four steps to get it. He took them.

That was the start. They played together, day after day and sometimes a little into the night, while almost imperceptibly the distance hetween them was reduced. Finally they sat together, side by side, and the boy had not yet learned to laugh but no longer did he show unease. He could now extract a simple tune from the instrumeot and was pleased with his own aptitude in a solemn sort of way.

One evening as darkness grew, and the things that sometimes howled at the Moon were howling again, Fander offered his tentacle-tip for the hundredth time. Always the gesture had been unmistakable even if its motive was not clear, yet always it had been rebuffed. But now, now, five fingers curled around it in shy desire to please.

With a fervent prayer that human nerves would function just like Martian ones, Fander poured his thoughts through, swiftly, lest the warm grip be loosened too soon.

"Do not fear me. I cannot help my shape any more than you can help yours. I am your friend, your father, your mother. I need you as much as you need me."

The boy let go of him, began quiet, half-stifled whimpering noises. Fander put a tentacle on his shoulder, made little patting motions that he imagined were wholly Martian. For some inexplicable reason, this made matters worse. At his wits' end what to do for the best, what action to take that might be understandable in Terrestrial terms, he gave the problem up, surrendered to his instinct, put a long, ropey limb around the boy and held him close until the noises ceased and slumber came. It was then he realized the child he had taken was much younger than he had estimated. He nursed him through the night.

Much practice was necessary to make conversation. The boy had to learn to put mental drive behind his thoughts, for it was beyond Fander's power to suck them out of him.

"What is your name?"

Fander got a picture of thin legs running rapidly.

He returned it in question form. "Speedy?"

An affirmative.

"What name do you call me?"

An unflattering montage of monsters.

"Devil?"

The picture whirled around, became confused. There was a trace of embarrassment.

"Devil will do," assured Fander. He went on. "Where are your parents?"

More confusion.

"You must have had parents. Everyone has a father and mother, haven't they? Don't you remember yours?"

Muddled ghost-pictures. Grown-ups leaving children. Grown-ups avoiding children, as if they feared them.

"What is the first thing you remember?"

"Big man walking with me. Carried me a bit. Walked again."

"What happened to him?"

"Went away. Said he was sick. Might make me sick too."

"Long ago?"

Confusion.

Fander changed his aim. "What of those other children—have they no parents either?"

"All got nobody."

"But you've got somebody now, haven't you, Speedy?"

Doubtfully. "Yes."

Fander pushed it farther. "Would you rather have me, or those other children?" He let it rest a moment before he added, "Or both?"

"Both," said Speedy with no hesitation. His fingers toyed with the harp.

"Would you like to help me look for them tomorrow and bring them here? And if they are scared of me will you help them not to be afraid?"

"Sure!" said Speedy, licking his

lips and sticking his chest out.

"Then," said Fander, "perhaps you would like to go for a walk today? You've been too long in this cave. Will you come for a walk with me?"

"Y'betcha!"

Side by side they went a short walk, one trotting rapidly along, the other slithering. The child's spirits perked up with this trip in the open; it was as if the sight of the sky and the feel of the grass made him realize at last that he was not exactly a prisoner. His formerly solemn features became animated, he made exclamations that Fander could not understand, and once he laughed at nothing for the sheer joy of it. On two occasions he grabbed a tentacle-tip in order to tell Fander something, performing the action as if it were in every way as natural as his own speech.

They got out the load-sled in the morning. Fander took the front seat and the controls; Speedy squatted behind him with hands gripping his harness-belt. With a shallow soar, they headed for the glade. Many small, white-tailed animals bolted down holes as they passed over.

"Good for dinner," remarked Speedy, touching him and speaking through the touch.

Fander felt sickened. Meat-eaters! It was not until a queer feeling of shame and apology came back at him that he knew the other had felt his revulsion. He wished he'd been swift to blanket that reaction before the boy could sense it, but he could not be blamed for the effect of so bald a statement taking him so completely unaware. However, it had produced another step forward in their mutual relationship—Speedy desired his good opinion.

Within fifteen minutes they struck lucky. At a point half a mile south of the glade Speedy let out a shrill yell and pointed downward. A small, golden-haired figure was standing there on a slight rise, staring fascinatedly upward at the phenomenon in the sky. A second tiny shape, with red hut equally long hair, was at the bottom of the slope gazing in similar wonderment. Both came to their senses and turned to flee as the sled tilted toward them.

Ignoring the yelps of excitement close behind him, and the pulls upon his belt, Fander swooped, got first one, then the other. This left him with only one limb to right the sled and gain height. If the victims had fought he would have had his work cut out to make it. They did not fight. They shrieked as he snatched them and then relaxed with closed eyes.

The sled climbed, glided a mile at five hundred feet. Fander's attention was divided between his limp prizes, the controls and the horizon when suddenly a thunderous rattling sounded on the metal base of the sled, the entire framework shuddered, a strip of metal flew from its leading edge and things made whining sounds toward the clouds.

"Old Graypate," bawled Speedy, jigging around bnt keeping away from the rim. "He's shooting at us."

The spoken words meant nothing

to the Martian and he could not spare a limb for the contact the other had forgotten to make. Grimly righting the sled, he gave it full power. Whatever damage it had suffered had not affected its efficiency; it shot forward at a pace that set the red and golden hair of the captives streaming in the wind. Perforce his landing by the cave was clumsy. The sled bumped down and lurched across forty yards of grass.

First things first. Taking the quiet pair into the cave, he made them comfortable on the bed, came out and examined the sled. There were half a dozen deep dents in its flat underside, two bright furrows angling across one rim. He made contact with Speedy.

"What were you trying to tell me?"

"Old Graypate shot at us."

The mind-picture burst upon him vividly and with electrifying effect: a vision of a tall, white-haired, stern-faced old man with a tubular weapon propped upon his shoulder while it spat fire upward. A white-haired old man! An adult!

His grip was tight on the other's arm. "What is this oldster to you?"

"Nothing much. He lives near us in the shelters."

Picture of a long, dusty concrete hurrow, hadly damaged, its ceiling marked with the scars of a lighting system which had rotted away to nothing. The old man living hermit-like at one end; the children at the other. The old man was sour, taciturn, kept the children at a distance, spoke to them seldom hut was quick to respond when they were menaced. He had guns. Once he had killed many wild dogs that had eaten two children.

"People left us near shelters because Old Graypate was there, and had guns," informed Speedy.

"But why does he keep away from children? Doesn't he like children?"

"Don't know." He mused a moment. "Once told us that old people could get very sick and make young ones sick—and then we'd all die. Maybe he's afraid of making us die." Speedy wasn't very sure about it.

So there was some much-feared disease around, something contagious, to which adults were peculiarly susceptible. Without hesitation they abandoned their young at the first onslaught, hoping that at least the children would live. Sacrifice after sacrifice that the remnants of the race might survive. Heartbreak after hearthreak as elders chose death alone rather than death together.

Yet Graypate himself was depicted as very old. Was this an exaggeration of the child-mind?

"I must meet Graypate."

"He will shoot," declared Speedy positively. "He knows by now that you took me. He saw you take the others. He will wait for you and shoot."

"We will find some way to avoid that."

"How?"

"When these two have become my friends, just as you have become my friend, I will take all three of you hack to the shelters. You can find Graypate for me and tell him that I am not as ugly as I look."

"I don't think you're ugly," denied Speedy.

The picture Fander got along with that gave him the weirdest sensation of pleasure. It was of a vague, shadowy but distorted body with a clear human face.

The new prisoners were female. Fander knew it without being told because they were daintier than Speedy and had the warm, sweet smell of females. That meant complications. Maybe they were mere children, and maybe they lived together in the shelter, but he was permitting none of that while they were in his charge. Fander might be outlandish by other standards but he had a certain primness. Forthwith he cut another and smaller cave for Speedy and himself.

Neither of the girls saw him for two days. Keeping well out of their sight, he let Speedy take them food, talk to them, prepare them for the shape of the thing to come. On the third day he presented himself for inspection at a distance. Despite forewarnings they went sheet-white, clung together, but uttered no distressing sounds. He played his harp a little while, withdrew, came back in the evening and played for them again.

Encouraged by Speedy's constant and self-assured flow of propaganda, one of them grasped a tentacle-tip next day. What came along the nerves was not a picture so much as an ache, a desire, a childish yearning. Fander backed out of the cave, found wood, spent the whole night using the sleepy Speedy as a model and fashioned the wood into a tiny, jointed semblance of a human being. He was no sculptor, but he possessed a natural delicacy of touch, and the poet in him ran through his limbs and expressed itself in the model. Making a thorough job of it, he clothed it in Terrestrial fashion, colored its face, fixed upon its features the pleasure-grimace which humans call a smile.

He gave her the doll the moment she awakened in the morning. She took it eagerly, hungrily, with wide, glad eyes. Hugging it to her unformed bosom, she crooned over it—and he knew that the strange emptiness within her was gone.

Though Speedy was openly contemptuous of this manifest waste of effort, Fander set to and made a second mannikin. It did not take quite as long. Practice on the first had made him swifter, more dexterous. He was able to present it to the other child by mid-afternoon. Her acceptance was made with shy grace, she held the doll close as if it meant more than the whole of her sorry world. In her thrilled concentration upon the gift, she did not notice his nearness, his closeness, and when he offered a tentacle, she took it.

He said, simply, "I love you."

Her mind was too untrained to drive a response, but her great eyes warmed.

Fander sat on the grounded sled at a point a mile east of the glade and watched the three children walk hand in hand toward the hidden shelters. Speedy was the obvious leader, hur-

rying them onward, bossing them with the noisy assurance of one who has been around and considers himself sophisticated. In spite of this, the girls paused at intervals to turn and wave to the ropey, bee-eyed thing they'd left behind. And Fander dutifully waved back, always using his signal-tentacle because it had not occurred to him that any tentacle would serve.

They sank from sight behind a rise of ground. He remained on the sled, his multi-faceted gaze going over his surroundings or studying the angry sky now threatening rain. The ground was a dull, dead gray-green all the way to the horizon. There was no relief from that drab color, not one shining patch of white, gold or crimson such as dotted the meadows of Mars. There was only the eternal gray-green and his own brilliant blueness.

Before long a sharp-faced, four-footed thing revealed itself in the grass, raised its head and howled at him. The sound was an eerily urgent wail that ran across the grasses and moaned into the distance. It brought others of its kind, two, ten, twenty. Their defiance increased with their numbers until there was a large band of them edging toward him with lips drawn back, teeth exposed. Then there came a sudden and undetectable flock-command which caused them to cease their slinking and spring forward like one, slavering as they came. They did it with the hungry, red-eyed frenzy of animals motivated by something akin to madness.

Repulsive though it was, the sight of creatures craving for meat—even strange blue meat—did not bother Fander. He slipped a control a notch, the flotation grids radiated, the sled soared twenty feet. So calm and easy an escape so casually performed infuriated the wild dog pack beyond all measure. Arriving beneath the sled, they made futile springs upward, fell back upon one another, bit and slashed each other, leaped again and again. The pandemonium they set up was a compound of snarls, yelps, barks and growls, the ferocious expressions of extreme hate. They exuded a pungent odor of dry hair and animal sweat.

Reclining on the sled in a maddening pose of disdain, Fander let the insane ones rave below. They raced around in tight circles shrieking insults at him and biting each other. This went on for some time and ended with a spurt of ultra-rapid cracks from the direction of the glade. Eight dogs fell dead. Two flopped and struggled to crawl away. Ten yelped in agony, made off on three legs. The unharmed ones flashed away to some place where they could make a meal of the escaping limpers. Fander lowered the sled.

Speedy stood on the rise with Graypate. The latter restored his weapon to the crook of his arm, rubbed his chin thoughtfully, ambled forward.

Stopping five yards from the Martian, the old Earthman again massaged his chin whiskers, then said, "It sure is the darnedest thing, just the darnedest thing!"

"No use talking *at* him," advised Speedy. "You've got to touch him, like I told you."

"I know, I know." Graypate betrayed a slight impatience. "All in good time. I'll touch him when I'm ready." He stood there, gazing at Fander with eyes that were very pale and very sharp. "Oh, well, here goes." He offered a hand.

Fander placed a tentacle-end in it.

"Jeepers, he's cold," commented Graypate, closing his grip. "Colder than a snake."

"He isn't a snake," Speedy contradicted fiercely.

"Ease up, ease up—I didn't say he is." Graypate seemed fond of repetitive phrases.

"He doesn't feel like one, either," persisted Speedy, who had never felt a snake and did not wish to.

Fander hoosted a thought through. "I come from the fourth planet. Do you know what that means?"

"I ain't ignorant," snapped Graypate aloud.

"No need to reply vocally. I receive your thoughts exactly as you receive mine. Your responses are much stronger than the boy's and I can understand you easily."

"Humph!" said Graypate to the world at large.

"I have been anxious to find an adult because the children can tell me little. I would like to ask questions. Do you feel inclined to answer questions?"

"It depends," answered Graypate, becoming leery.

"Never mind. Answer them if you wish. My only desire is to help you."

"Why?" asked Graypate, searching around for a percentage.

"We need intelligent friends."

"Why?"

"Our numbers are small, our resources poor. In visiting this world and the misty one we've come near to the limit of our ability. But with assistance we could go farther. I think that if we could help you a time might come when you could help us."

Graypate pondered it cautiously, forgetting that the inward workings of his mind were wide-open to the other. Chronic suspicion was the keynote of his thoughts, suspicion based on life experiences and recent history. But inward thoughts ran both ways, and his own mind detected the clear sincerity in Fander's.

So he said, "Fair enough. Say more."

"What caused all this?" inquired Fander, waving a limb at the world.

"War," said Graypate. "The last war we'll ever have. The entire place went nuts."

"How did that come about?"

"You've got me there." Graypate gave the problem grave consideration. "I reckon it wasn't just any one thing; it was a multitude of things sort of piling themselves up."

"Such as?"

"Differences in people. Some were colored differently in their bodies, others in their ideas, and they couldn't get along. Some bred faster than others, wanted more room, more food. There wasn't any more room or more food. The world was full and

nobody could shove in except by pushing another out. My old man told me plenty before he died, and he always maintained that if folk had had the hoss-sense to keep their numbers down there might not—"

"Your old man?" interjected Fander. "Your father? Didn't all this occur in your own lifetime?"

"It did not. I saw none of it. I am the son of the son of a survivor."

"Let's go back to the cave," put in Speedy, bored with this silent contact-talk. "I want to show him our harp."

They took no notice, and Fander went on, "Do you think there might be a lot of others still living?"

"Who knows?" Graypate was moody about it. "There isn't any way of telling how many are wandering around the other side of the globe, maybe still killing each other, or starving to death, or dying of the sickness."

"What sickness is this?"

"I couldn't tell what it is called." Graypate scratched his head confusedly. "My old man told me a few times, but I've long forgotten. Knowing the name wouldn't do me any good, see? He said his father told him that it was part of the war, it got invented and was spread deliberately—and it's still with us."

"What are its symptoms?"

"You go hot and dizzy. You get black swellings in the armpits. In forty-eight hours you're dead. Old ones get it first. The kids then catch it unless you make away from them mighty fast."

"It is nothing familiar to me," said Fander, unable to recognize cultured bubonic. "In any case, I'm not a medical expert." He eyed Graypate. "But you seem to have avoided it."

"Sheer luck," opined Graypate. "Or maybe I can't get it. There was a story going around during the war that some folk might develop immunity to it, durned if I know why. Could be that I'm immune, but I don't count on it."

"So you keep your distance from these children?"

"Sure." He glanced at Speedy. "I shouldn't really have come along with this kid. He's got a lousy chance as it is without me increasing the odds."

"That is thoughtful of you," Fander put over softly. "Especially seeing that you must be lonely."

Graypate bristled and his thought-flow became aggressive. "I ain't grieving for company. I can look after myself, like I have done since my old man went away to curl up by himself. I'm on my own feet. So's every other guy."

"I believe that," said Fander. "You must pardon me—I'm a stranger here myself. I judged you by my own feelings. Now and again I get pretty lonely."

"How come?" demanded Graypate, staring at him. "You ain't telling me they dumped you and left you, on your own?"

"They did."

"Man!" exclaimed Graypate fervently.

Man! It was a picture resembling Speedy's conception, a vision elusive in form but firm and human in face.

The oldster was reacting to what he considered a predicament rather than a choice, and the reaction came on a wave of sympathy.

Fander struck promptly and hard. "You see how I'm fixed. The companionship of wild animals is nothing to me. I need someone intelligent enough to like my music and forget my looks, someone intelligent enough to—"

"I ain't so sure we're that smart," Graypate chipped in. He let his gaze swing morbidly around the landscape. "Not when I see this graveyard and think of how it looked in granpop's days."

"Every flower blooms from the dust of a hundred dead ones," answered Fander.

"What are flowers?"

It shocked the Martian. He had projected a mind-picture of a trumpet lily, crimson and shining, and Graypate's brain had juggled it around, uncertain whether it were fish, flesh or fowl.

"Vegetable growths, like these." Fander plucked half a dozen blades of blue-green grass. "But more colorful, and sweet-scented." He transmitted the brilliant vision of a mile-square field of trumpet lilies, red and glowing.

"Glory be!" said Graypate. "We've nothing like those."

"Not here," agreed Fander. "Not here." He gestured toward the horizon. "Elsewhere may be plenty. If we got together we could be company for each other, we could learn things from each other. We could pool our ideas, our efforts, and search for flowers far away — also for more people."

"Folk just won't get together in large bunches. They stick to each other in family groups until the plague breaks them up. Then they abandon the kids. The bigger the crowd, the bigger the risk of someone contaminating the lot." He leaned on his gun, staring at the other, his thought-forms shaping themselves in dull solemnity. "When a guy gets hit he goes away and takes it on his own. The end is a personal contract between him and his God, with no witnesses. Death's a pretty private affair these days."

"What, after all these years? Don't you think that by this time the disease may have run its course and exhausted itself?"

"Nobody knows — and nobody's gambling on it."

"I would gamble," said Fander.

"You ain't like us. You mightn't be able to catch it."

"Or I might get it worse, and die more painfully."

"Mebbe," admitted Graypate, doubtfully. "Anyway, you're looking at it from a different angle. You've been dumped on your ownsome. What've you got to lose?"

"My life," said Fander.

Graypate rocked back on his heels, then said, "Yes, sir, that is a gamble. A guy can't bet any heavier than that." He rubbed his chin whiskers as before. "All right, all right, I'll take you up on that. You come right here and live with us." His grip tightened on his gun, his knuckles showing white. "On this understand-

ing: the moment you feel sick you get out fast, and for keeps. If you don't, I'll bump you and drag you away myself, even if that makes me get it too. The kids come first, see?"

The shelters were far roomier than the cave. There were eighteen children living in them, all skinny with their prolonged diet of roots, edible herbs and an occasional rabbit. The youngest and most sensitive of them ceased to he terrified of Fander after ten days. Within four months his slithering shape of blue ropeyness had become a normal adjunct of their small, limited world.

Six of the youngsters were males older than Speedy, one of them much older but not yet adult. He beguiled them with his harp, teaching them to play, and now and again giving them ten-minute rides on the load-sled as a special treat. He made dolls for the girls, and queer, cone-shaped little houses for the dolls, and fan-backed chairs of woven grass for the houses. None of these toys were truly Martian in design, and none were Terrestrial. They represented a pathetic compromise within his imagination; the Martian notion of what Terrestrial models might have looked like had there been any in existence.

But surreptitiously, without seeming to give any less attention to the younger ones, he directed his main efforts upon the six older boys and Speedy. To his mind, these were the hope of the world—and of Mars. At no time did he bother to ponder that the non-technical hrain is not without its virtues, or that there are times and circumstances when it is worth dropping the short view of what is practicable for the sake of the long view of what is remotely possible. So as best he could he concentrated upon the elder seven, educating them through the dragging months, stimulating their minds, encouraging their curiosity, and continually impressing upon them the idea that fear of disease can become a folk-separating dogma unless they conquered it within their souls.

He taught them that death is death, a natural process to be accepted philosophically and met with dignity —and there were times when he suspected that he was teaching them nothing, he was merely reminding them, for deep within their growing minds was the ancestral strain of Terrestrialism which had mulled its way to the same conclusions ten or twenty thousands of years before. Still, he was helping to remove this disease-block from the path of the stream, and was driving child-logic more rapidly toward adult outlook. In that respect he was satisfied . He could do little more.

In time, they organized group concerts, humming or making singing noises to the accompaniment of the harp, now and again improvising lines to suit Fander's tunes, arguing out the respective merits of chosen words until by process of elimination they had a complete song. As songs grew to a repertoire and singing grew more adept, more polished, Old Graypate displayed interest, came to one performance, then another, until by custom he had established his own place

as a one-man audience.

One day the eldest boy, who was named Redhead, came to Fander and grasped a tentacle-tip. "Devil, may I operate your food-machine?"

"You mean you would like me to show you how to work it?"

"No, Devil, I know how to work it." The boy gazed self-assuredly into the other's great bee-eyes.

"Then how is it operated?"

"You fill its container with the tenderest blades of grass, being careful not to include roots. You are equally careful not to turn a switch before the container is full and its door completely closed. You then turn the red switch for a count of two hundred eighty, reverse the container, turn the green switch for a count of forty-seven. You then close both switches, empty the container's warm pulp into the end molds and apply the press until the biscuits are firm and dry."

"How have you discovered all this?"

"I have watched you make biscuits for us many times. This morning, while you were busy, I tried it myself." He extended a hand. It held a biscuit. Taking it from him, Fander examined it. Firm, crisp, well-shaped. He tasted it. Perfect.

Redhead became the first mechanic to operate and service a Martian lifeboat's emergency premasticator. Seven years later, long after the machine had ceased to function, he managed to repower it, weakly but effectively, with dust that gave forth alpha sparks. In another five years he had improved it, speeded it up. In twenty years he had duplicated it and had all the know-how needed to turn out premasticators on a large scale. Fander could not have equalled this performance for, as a non-technician, he'd no better notion than the average Terrestrial of the principles upon which the machine worked, neither did he know what was meant by radiant digestion or protein enrichment. He could do little more than urge Redhead along and leave the rest to whatever inherent genius the boy possessed—which was plenty.

In similar manner, Speedy and two youths named Blacky and Bigears took the load-sled out of his charge. On rare occasions, as a great privilege, Fander had permitted them to take up the sled for one-hour trips, alone. This time they were gone from dawn to dusk. Graypate mooched around, gun under arm, another smaller one stuck in his belt, going frequently to the top of a rise and scanning the skies in all directions. The delinquents swooped in at sunset, bringing with them a strange boy.

Fander summoned them to him. They held hands so that his touch would give him simultaneous contact with all three.

"I am a little worried. The sled has only so much power. When it is all gone there will be no more."

They eyed each other aghast.

"Unfortunately, I have neither the knowledge nor the ability to energize the sled once its power is exhausted. I lack the wisdom of the friends who left me here—and that is my shame." He paused, watching them dolefully,

then went on, "All I do know is that its power does not leak away. If not used much, the reserves will remain for many years." Another pause before he added, "And in a few years you will be men."

Blacky said, "But, Devil, when we are men we'll be much heavier and the sled will use so much more power."

"How do you know that?" Fander put it sharply.

"More weight, more power to sustain it," opined Blacky with the air of one whose logic is incontrovertible. "It doesn't need thinking out. *It's obvious.*"

Very slowly and softly, Fander told him, "You'll do. May the twin moons shine upon you someday, for I know you'll do."

"Do what, Devil?"

"Build a thousand sleds like this one, or better—and explore the whole world."

From that time onward they confined their trips strictly to one hour, making them less frequently than of yore, spending more time poking and prying around the sled's innards.

Graypate changed character with the slow reluctance of the aged. Leastways, as two years then three rolled past, he came gradually out of his shell, was less taciturn, more willing to mix with those swiftly growing up to his own height. Without fully realizing what he was doing he joined forces with Fander, gave the children the remnants of Earthly wisdom passed down from his father's father He taught the boys how to use the guns of which he had as many as eleven, some maintained mostly as a source of spares for others. He took them shell-hunting; digging deep beneath rotting foundations into stale, half-filled cellars in search of ammunition not too far corroded for use.

"Guns ain't no use without shells, and shells don't last forever."

Neither do buried shells. They found not one.

Of his own wisdom Graypate stubbornly withheld but a single item until the day when Speedy and Redhead and Blacky chivvied it out of him. Then, like a father facing the hangman, he gave them the truth about babies. He made no comparative mention of bees because there were no bees, nor of flowers because there were no flowers. One cannot analogize the non-existent. Nevertheless he managed to explain the matter more or less to their satisfaction, after which he mopped his forehead and went to Fander.

"These youngsters are getting too nosey for my comfort. They've been asking me how kids come along."

"Did you tell them?"

"I sure did." He sat down, staring at the Martian, his pale gray eyes bothered. "I don't mind giving in to the boys when I can't beat 'em off any longer, but I'm durned if I'm going to tell the girls."

Fander said, "I have been asked about this many a time before. I could not tell much because I was by no means certain whether you breed precisely as we breed. But I told them how *we* breed."

"The girls too?"

"Of course."

"Jeepers!" Graypate mopped his forehead again. "How did they take it?"

"Just as if I'd told them why the sky is blue or why water is wet."

"Must've been something in the way you put it to them," opined Graypate.

"I told them it was poetry between persons."

Throughout the course of history, Martian, Venusian or Terrestrial, some years are more noteworthy than others. The twelfth one after Fander's marooning was outstanding for its series of events each of which was pitifully insignificant by cosmic standards but loomed enormously in this small community life.

To start with, on the basis of Redhead's improvements to the premasticator, the older seven — now bearded men — contrived to repower the exhausted sled and again took to the air for the first time in forty months. Experiments showed that the Martian load-carrier was now slower, could bear less weight, but had far longer range. They used it to visit the ruins of distant cities in search of metallic junk suitable for the building of more sleds, and by early summer they had constructed another, larger than the original, clumsy to the verge of dangerousness, but still a sled.

On several occasions they failed to find metal but did find people, odd families surviving in under-surface shelters, clinging grimly to life and passed-down scraps of knowledge. Since all these new contacts were strictly human to human, with no weirdly tentacled shape to scare off the parties of the second part, and since many were finding fear of plague more to be endured than their terrible loneliness, many families returned with the explorers, settled in the shelters, accepted Fander, added their surviving skills to the community's riches.

Thus local population grew to seventy adults and four hundred children. They compounded with their plague-fear by spreading through the shelters, digging through half-wrecked and formerly unused expanses, and moving apart to form twenty or thirty lesser communities each one of which could be isolated should death reappear.

Growing morale born of added strength and confidence in numbers soon resulted in four more sleds, still clumsy but slightly less dangerous to manage. There also appeared the first rock house above ground, standing four-square and solidly under the gray skies, a defiant witness that mankind still considered itself a cut above the rats and rabbits. The community presented the house to Blacky and Sweetvoice, who had announced their desire to associate. An adult who claimed to know the conventional routine spoke solemn words over the happy couple before many witnesses, while Fander attended the groom as best Martian.

Toward summer's end Speedy returned from a solo sled-trip of many days, brought with him one old man,

one boy and four girls, all of strange, outlandish countenance. They were yellow in complexion, had black hair, black, almond-shaped eyes, and spoke a language that none could understand. Until these newcomers had picked up the local speech, Fander had to act as interpreter, for his mind-pictures and theirs were independent of vocal sounds. The four girls were quiet, modest and very beautiful. Within a month Speedy had married one of them whose name was a gentle clucking sound which meant Precious Jewel Ling.

After this wedding, Fander sought Graypate, placed a tentacle-tip in his right hand. "There were differences between the man and the girl, distinctive features wider apart than any we know upon Mars. Are these some of the differences which caused your war?"

"I dunno. I've never seen one of these yellow folk before. They must live mighty far off." He rubbed his chin to help his thoughts along. "I only know what my old man told me and his old man told him. There were too many folk of too many different sorts."

"They can't be all that different if they can fall in love."

"Mebbe not," agreed Graypate.

"Supposing most of the people still in this world could assemble here, breed together, and have less different children; the children bred others still less different. Wouldn't they eventually become all much the same — just Earth-people?"

"Mebbe so."

"All speaking the same language, sharing the same culture? If they spread out slowly from a central source, always in contact by sled, continually sharing the same knowledge, same progress, would there be any room for new differences to arise?"

"I dunno," said Graypate evasively. "I'm not so young as I used to be and I can't dream as far ahead as I used to do."

"It doesn't matter so long as the young ones can dream it." Fander mused a moment. "If you're beginning to think yourself a back number you're in good company. Things are getting somewhat out of hand as far as I'm concerned. The onlooker sees the most of the game and perhaps that's why I'm more sensitive than you to a certain peculiar feeling."

"To what feeling?" inquired Graypate, eyeing him.

"That Terra is on the move once more. There are now many people where there were few. A house is up and more are to follow. They talk of six more. After the six they will talk of sixty, then six hundred, then six thousand. Some are planning to haul up sunken conduits and use them to pipe water from the northward lake. Sleds are being built. Premasticators will soon be built, and force-screens likewise. Children are being taught. Less and less is being heard of your plague and so far no more have died of it. I feel a dynamic surge of energy and ambition and genius which may grow with appalling rapidity until it becomes a mighty flood. I feel that I, too, am a back number."

"Bunk!" said Graypate. He spat

on the ground. "If you dream often enough you're bound to have a bad one once in a while."

"Perhaps it is because so many of my tasks have been taken over and done better than I was doing them. I have failed to seek new tasks. Were I a technician I'd have discovered a dozen by now. Reckon this is as good a time as any to turn to a job with which you can help me."

"What is that?"

"A long, long time ago I made a poem. It was for the beautiful thing that first impelled me to stay here. I do not know exactly what its maker had in mind, nor whether my eyes see it as he wished it to be seen, but I have made a poem to express what I feel when I look upon his work."

"Humpb!" said Graypate, not very interested.

"There is an outcrop of solid rock beneath its base which I can shave smooth and use as a plinth on which to inscribe my words. I would like to put them down twice: in the script of Mars and the script of Earth." Fander hesitated a moment, then went on. "Perhaps this is presumptuous of me, but it is many years since I wrote for all to read — and my chance may never come again."

Graypate said, "I get the idea. You want me to put down your notions in our writing so you can copy it."

"Yes."

"Give me your stylus and pad." Taking them, Graypate squatted on a rock, lowering himself stiffly, for he was feeling the weight of his years. Resting the pad on his knees, he held the writing instrument in his right hand while his left continued to grasp a tentacle-tip. "Go ahead."

He started drawing thick, laborious marks as Fander's mind-pictures came through, enlarging the letters and keeping them well separated. When he had finished he handed the pad over.

"Asymmetrical," decided Fander, staring at the queer letters and wishing for the first time that he had taken up the study of Earth-writing. "Cannot you make this part balance with that, and this with this?"

"It's what you said."

"It is your own translation of what I said. I would like it better balanced. Do you mind if we try again?"

They tried again. They made fourteen attempts before Fander was satisfied with the perfunctory appearance of letters and words he could not understand.

Taking the paper, he found his ray-gun, went to the base-rock of the beautiful thing and sheared the whole front to a flat, even surface. Adjusting his beam to cut a V-shaped channel one inch deep, he inscribed his poem on the rock in long, unpunctuated lines of neat Martian curlicues. With less confidence and much greater care, he repeated the verse in Earth's awkward, angular hieroglyphics. The task took him quite a time and there were fifty people watching him when he finished. They said nothing. In utter silence they looked at the poem and at the beautiful thing, and were still standing there brooding solemnly when he went away.

One by one the rest of the community visited the site next day, going and coming with the air of pilgrims attending an ancient shrine. All stood there a long time, returned without comment. Nobody praised Fander's work, nobody damned it, nobody reproached him for alienizing something wholly Earth's. The only effect — too subtle to be noteworthy — was a greater and still growing grimness and determination that boosted the already swelling Earth-dynamic.

In that respect, Fander wrought better than he knew.

A plague-scare came in the fourteenth year. Two sleds had brought back families from afar and within a week of their arrival the children sickened, became spotted.

Metal gongs sounded the alarm, all work ceased, the affected section was cut off and guarded, the majority prepared to flee. It was a threatening reversal of all the things for which many had toiled so long: a destructive scattering of the tender roots of new civilization.

Fander found Graypate, Speedy and Blacky, armed to the teeth, facing a drawn-faced and restless crowd.

"There's most of a hundred folk in that isolated part," Graypate was telling them. "They ain't all got it. Maybe they won't get it. If they don't, it ain't so likely you'll go down either. We ought to wait and see. Stick around a bit."

"Listen who's talking," invited a voice in the crowd. "If you weren't immune you'd have been planted thirty-forty years ago."

"Same goes for near everybody," snapped Graypate. He glared around, his gun under one arm, his pale blue eyes bellicose. "I ain't much use at speechifying, so I'm just saying flatly that nobody goes before we know whether this really is the plague." He hefted his weapon in one hand, held it forward. "Anyone fancy himself at beating a bullet?"

The heckler in the audience muscled his way to the front. He was a swarthy man of muscular build, and his dark eyes looked belligerently into Graypate's. "While there's life there's hope. If we beat it we live to come back, when it's safe to come back, if ever — and you know it. So I'm calling your bluff, see?" Squaring his shoulders, he began to walk off.

Graypate's gun already was halfway up when he felt the touch of Fander's tentacle on his arm. He lowered the weapon, called after the escapee.

"I'm going into that cut-off section and the Devil is going with me. We're running into things, not away from them. I never did like running away." Several of the audience fidgeted, murmured approval. He went on, "We'll see for ourselves just what's wrong. We mightn't be able to put it right, but we'll find out what's the matter."

The walker paused, turned, eyed him, eyed Fander, and said, "You can't do that."

"Why not?"

"You'll get it yourself — and a heck of a lot of use you'll be dead and stinking."

"What, and me immune?" cracked Graypate grinning.

"The Devil will get it," hedged the other.

Graypate was about to retort, "What do *you* care?" but altered it slightly in response to Fander's contacting thoughts. He said, more softly, "Do you *care?*"

It caught the other off-balance. He fumbled embarrassedly within his own mind, avoided looking at the Martian, said lamely, "I don't see reason for any guy to take risks."

"He's taking them because *he* cares," Graypate gave back. "And I'm taking them because I'm too old and useless to give a darn."

With that, he stepped down, marched stubbornly toward the isolated section, Fander slithering by his side, tentacle in hand. The one who wished to flee stayed put, staring after them. The crowd shuffled uneasily, seemed in two minds whether to accept the situation and stick around, or whether to rush Graypate and Fander and drag them away. Speedy and Blacky made to follow the pair but were ordered off.

No adult sickened; nobody died. Children in the affected sector went one after another through the same routine of liverishness, high temperature and spots until the epidemic of measles had died out. Not until a month after the last case had been cured by something within its own constitution did Graypate and Fander emerge.

The innocuous course and eventual disappearance of this suspected plague gave the pendulum of confidence a push, swinging it farther. Morale boosted itself almost to the verge of arrogance. More sleds appeared, more mechanics serviced them, more pilots rode them. More people flowed in; more oddments of past knowledge came with them.

Humanity was off to a flying start with the salvaged seeds of past wisdom and the urge to do. The tormented ones of Earth were not primitive savages, but surviving organisms of a greatness nine-tenths destroyed but still remembered, each contributing his mite of know-how to restore at least some of those things which had been boiled away in atomic fires.

When, in the twentieth year, Redhead duplicated the premasticator, there were eight thousand stone houses standing around the hill. A community hall seventy times the size of a house, with a great green dome of copper, reared itself upon the eastward fringe. A dam held the lake to the north. A hospital was going up in the west. The nuances and energies and talents of fifty races had built this town and were still building it. Among them were ten Polynesians and four Icelanders and one lean, dusky child who was the last of the Seminoles.

Farms spread wide. One thousand heads of Indian corn rescued from a sheltered valley in the Andes had grown to ten thousand acres. Water buffaloes and goats had been brought from afar to serve in lieu of the horses and sheep that would never be seen again—and no man knew why one species survived while another

did not. The horses had died; the water huffaloes lived. The canines hunted in ferocious packs; the felines had departed from existence. The small herbs, some tubers and a few seedy things could be rescued and cultivated for hungry bellies; but there were no flowers for the hungry mind. Humanity carried on, making do with what was available. No more than that could be done.

Fander was a back-number. He had nothing left for which to live but his songs and the affection of the others. In everything but his harp and his songs the Terrans were way ahead of him. He could do no more than give of his own affection in return for theirs and wait with the patience of one whose work is done.

At the end of that year they buried Graypate. He died in his sleep, passing with the undramatic casualness of one who ain't much use at speechifying. They put him to rest on a knoll behind the community hall, and Fander played his mourning song, and Precious Jewel, who was Speedy's wife, planted the grave with sweet herbs.

In the spring of the following year Fander summoned Speedy and Blacky and Redhead. He was coiled on a couch, blue and shivering. They held hands so that his touch would speak to them simultaneously.

"I am about to undergo my *amafa*."

He had great difficulty in putting it over in understandable thought-forms, for this was something beyond their Earthly experience.

"It is an unavoidable change of age during which my kind must sleep undisturbed." They reacted as if the casual reference to his kind was a strange and startling revelation, a new aspect previously unthought-of. He continued, "I must be left alone until this hibernation has run its natural course."

"For how long, Devil?" asked Speedy, with anxiety.

"It may stretch from four of your months to a full year, or—"

"Or what?" Speedy did not wait for a reassuring reply. His agile mind was swift to sense the spice of danger lying far back in the Martian's thoughts. "Or it may never end?"

"It may never," admitted Fander, reluctantly. He shivered again, drew his tentacles around himself. The brilliance of his blueness was fading visibly. "The possibility is small, but it is there."

Speedy's eyes widened and his breath was taken in a short gasp. His mind was striving to readjust itself and accept the appalling idea that Fander might not be a mixture, permanent, established for all time. Blacky and Redhead were equally aghast.

"We Martians do not last for ever," Fander pointed out, gently. "All are mortal, here and there. He who survives his *amafa* has many happy years to follow, but some do not survive. It is a trial that must be faced as everything from beginning to end must be faced."

"But—"

"Our numbers are not large," Fander went on. "We breed slowly and

some of us die halfway through the normal span. By cosmic standards we are a weak and foolish people much in need of the support of the clever and the strong. You are clever and strong. Whenever my people visit you again, or any other still stranger people come, always remember that you are clever and strong."

"We are strong," echoed Speedy, dreamily. His gaze swung around to take in the thousands of roofs, the copper dome, the tbing of beauty on the hill. "We are strong."

A prolonged shudder went through the ropey, hee-eyed creature on the couch.

"I do not wish to be left here, an idle sleeper in the midst of life, posing like a had example to the young. I would rather rest within the little cave where first we made friends and grew to know and understand each other. Wall it up and fix a door for me. Forbid anyone to touch me or let the light of day fall upon me until such time as I emerge of my own accord." Fander stirred sluggishly, his limhs uncoiling with noticeable lack of sinuousness. "I regret I must ask you to carry me there. Please forgive me; I have left it a little late and cannot . . . cannot . . . make it by myself."

Their faces were pictures of alarm, their minds bells of sorrow. Running for poles, they made a stretcher, edged him onto it, bore him to the cave. A long procession was following by the time they reached it. As they settled him comfortably and hegan to wall up the entrance, the crowd watched in the same solemn silence with which they had looked upon his verse.

He was already a tightly rolled ball of dull hlueness, with filmed eyes, when they fitted the door and closed it, leaving him to darkness and slumber. Next day a tiny, hrown-skinned man with eight children, all hugging dolls, came to the door. While the youngsters stared huge-eyed at the door, he fixed upon it a two-word name in metal letters, taking great pains over his self-imposed task and making a neat job of it.

The Martian vessel came from the stratosphere with the slow, stately fall of a grounding balloon. Behind the transparent band its hluish, night-marish crew were assemhled and looking with great, multi-faceted eyes at the upper surface of the clouds. The scene resemhled a pink-tinged snowfield beneath which the planet still remained concealed.

Captain Rdina could feel this as a tense, exciting moment even though his vessel had not the honor to be the first with such an approach. One Captain Skhiva, now long retired, had done it many years before. Nevertheless, this second venture retained its own exploratory thrill.

Someone stationed a third of the way around the vessel's belly came writhing at top pace toward him as their drop brought them near to the pinkish clouds. The oncomer's signalling tentacle was jiggling at a seldom used rate.

"Captain, we have just seen an object swoop across the horizon."

"What sort of an object?"

"It looked like a gigantic load-

sled."

"It couldn't have been."

"No, Captain, of course not—but that is exactly what it appeared to be."

"Where is it now" demanded Rdina, gazing toward the side from which the other had come.

"It dived into the mists below."

"You must have been mistaken. Long-standing anticipation can encourage the strangest delusions." He stopped a moment as the observation band became shrouded in the vapor of a cloud. Musingly, he watched the gray wall of fog slide upward as his vessel continued its descent. "That old report says definitely that there is nothing but desolation and wild animals. There is no intelligent life except some fool of a minor poet whom Skhiva left behind, and twelve to one he's dead by now. The animals may have eaten him."

"Eaten him? Eaten *meat?*" exclaimed the other, thoroughly revolted.

"Anything is possible," assured Rdina, pleased with the extreme to which his imagination could be stretched. "Except a load-sled. That was plain silly."

At which point he had no choice but to let the subject drop for the simple and compelling reason that the ship came out of the base of the cloud, and the sled in question was floating alongside. It could be seen in complete detail, and even their own instruments were responding to the powerful output of its numerous flotation-grids.

The twenty Martians aboard the sphere sat staring bee-eyed at this enormous thing which was half the size of their own vessel, and the forty humans on the sled stared back with equal intentness. Ship and sled continued to descend side by side, while both crews studied each other with dumb fascination which persisted until simultaneously they touched ground.

It was not until he felt the slight jolt of landing that Captain Rdina recovered sufficiently to look elsewhere. He saw the houses, the green-domed building, the thing of beauty poised upon its hill, the many hundreds of Earth-people streaming out of their town and toward his vessel.

None of these queer, two-legged life-forms, he noted, betrayed slightest sign of revulsion or fear. They galloped to the tryst with a bumptious self-confidence which would still be evident any place the other side of the cosmos.

It shook him a little, and he kept saying to himself, again and again, "They're not scared—why should you be? They're not scared—why should you be?"

He went out personally to meet the first of them, suppressing his own apprehensions and ignoring the fact that many of them bore weapons. The leading Earthman, a big-built, spade-bearded two-legger, grasped his tentacle as to the manner born.

There came a picture of swiftly moving limbs. "My name is Speedy."

The ship emptied itself within ten minutes. No Martian would stay inside who was free to smell new air.

Their first visit, in a slithering bunch, was to the thing of beauty. Rdina stood quietly looking at it, his crew clustered in a half-circle around him, the Earth-folk a silent audience behind.

It was a great rock statue of a female of Earth. She was broad-shouldered, full-bosomed, wide-hipped, and wore voluminous skirts that came right down to her heavy-soled shoes. Her hack was a little bent, her head a little bowed, and her face was hidden in her hands, deep in her toil-worn hands. Rdina tried in vain to gain some glimpse of the tired features behind those hiding hands. He looked at her a long while before his eyes lowered to read the script beneath, ignoring the Earth-lettering, running easily over the flowing Martian curlicues:

Weep, my country, for your sons asleep,
The ashes of your homes, your tottering towers.
Weep, my country, O, my country, weep!
For birds that cannot sing, for vanished flowers,
The end of everything,
The silenced hours.
Weep! my country.

There was no signature. Rdina mulled it through many minutes while the others remained passive. Then he turned to Speedy, pointed to the Martian script.

"Who wrote this?"

"One of your people. He is dead."

"Ah!" said Rdina. "That songhird of Skhiva's. I have forgotten his name. I douht whether many remember it. He was only a very small poet. How did he die?"

"He ordered us to enclose him for some long and urgent sleep he must have, and —"

"The *amafa,*" put in Rdina, comprehendingly. "And then?"

"We did as he asked. He warned us that he might never come out." Speedy gazed at the sky, unconscious that Rdina was picking up his sorrowful thoughts. "He has been there nearly two years and has not emerged." The eyes came down to Rdina. "I don't know whether you can understand me, hut he was one of us."

"I think I understand." Rdina was thoughtful. He asked, "How long is this period you call nearly two years?"

They managed to work it out between them, translating it from Terran to Martian time-terms.

"It is long," pronounced Rdina. "Much longer than the usual *amafa,* hut not unique. Occasionally, for no known reason, someone takes even longer. Besides, Earth is Earth and Mars is Mars." He became swift, energetic as he called to one of his crew. "Physician Traith, we have a prolonged *amafa* case. Get your oils and essences and come with me." When the other had returned, he said to Speedy, "Take us to where he sleeps."

Reaching the door to the walled-up cave, Rdina paused to look at the names fixed upon it in neat but incomprehensihle letters. They read: DEAR DEVIL.

"What do those mean?" asked Physician Traith, pointing.

"Do not disturb," guessed Rdina carelessly. Pushing open the door, he let the other enter first, closed it behind him to keep all others outside.

They reappeared an hour later. The total population of the city had congregated outside the cave to see the Martians. Rdina wondered why they had not permitted his crew to satisfy their natural curiosity, since it was unlikely that they would be more interested in other things—such as the fate of one small poet. Ten thousand eyes were upon them as they came into the sunlight and fastened the cave's door. Rdina made contact with Speedy, gave him the news.

Stretching himself in the light as if reaching toward the sun, Speedy shouted in a voice of tremendous gladness which all could hear.

"He will be out again within twenty days."

At that, a mild form of madness seemed to overcome the two-leggers. They made pleasure-grimaces, piercing mouth-noises and some went so far as to beat each other.

Twenty Martians felt like joining Fander that same night. The Martian constitution is peculiarly susceptible to emotion.

THE END

NEWS OF THE MONTH

Latest reports on what our readers are doing. Fan clubs, social events and personalities in the limelight.

FLASH: The sister magazine to OTHER WORLDS is due to be released June 1st. This will be another science-fiction magazine, the title of which will be announced at a later date.

Ray Bradbury, who has just sold a story titled *Way In The Middle Of The Air* to OTHER WORLDS, informs us that The *Saturday Evening Post* has just purchased one of his yarns. That's one of the best ways of starting off the New Year that we know of.

Take a close look at the Philco Playhouse TV commercial, and you might possibly recognize George O. Smith's VENUS EQUILATERAL which is among the books displayed in the background.

Rog Phillips' next pocket-book, *Worlds Within*, is scheduled for release within the next two months. Judging from the way *Time Trap* sold, you'd better keep an eye on your favorite newsstand and get a copy before they're sold out.

The picture *Destination Moon*, made from Robert Heinlein's *Rocket Ship Galileo* was given some publicity on radio station WOSU, Columbus, Ohio.

The N3F Aux. Lending Library will be starting operations very shortly. Books may be rented from the library at 25c for the first two weeks, and 10c for the next two weeks. Of the initial 25c rental fee, 15c will be used for repair of damaged books and purchase of new ones. The library will appreciate any books donated, but they may not accept books less than one year old in order to avoid impairing potential sales for the authors and publishers. Any donations or requests for information should be directed to Betty Sullivan, 4234 Florida Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio.

The Washington *News Letter* announces that April 30, 1950 has been set as the date of the DISCLAVE. Fans in and around Wash., D. C. won't want to miss this get-together. For more detailed information write Chick Derry, 6604 Allegheny, Takoma Park, Maryland.

WAR OF NERVES

By A. E. VAN VOGT

The spaceship flashed through the void — and all at once there began a battle of wits to the death between the crew and a non-human race on a planet still light years away . . .

THE *voyage of the* Space Beagle *—Man's first expedition to the great galaxy, M33 in Andromeda—had produced some grisly incidents. Not once, but three times, deadly attacks by aliens had been made against the 900-odd scientists under Director Morton, and the 140 military personnel commanded by Captain Leeth—all this entirely aside from the tensions that had developed among the men themselves. Hate, dislike, anxiety, ambition — of which Chief Chemist Kent's desire to be Director was but one example—permeated every activity aboard.*

Elliott Grosvenor, the only Nexialist on the ship, sometimes had the feeling that even one more danger would be too much for the physically weary and emotionally exhausted men, who were now on the long return journey to Earth.

The danger came.

Elliott Grosvenor had just said to Korita, the archeologist aboard the *Space Beagle:* "Your brief outline of cyclic history is what I've been looking for. I did have some knowledge of it, of course. It wasn't taught at the Nexial Foundation since it's a form of philosophy. But a curious man picks up odds and ends of information."

They had paused at the "glass" room on Grosvenor's floor. It wasn't glass, and it wasn't, by strict definition, a room. It was an alcove of an outer wall corridor, and the "glass" was an enormous curving plate made from a crystallized form of one of the Resistance metals. It was so limpidly transparent as to give the illusion that nothing at all was there—beyond was the vacuum and darkness of space.

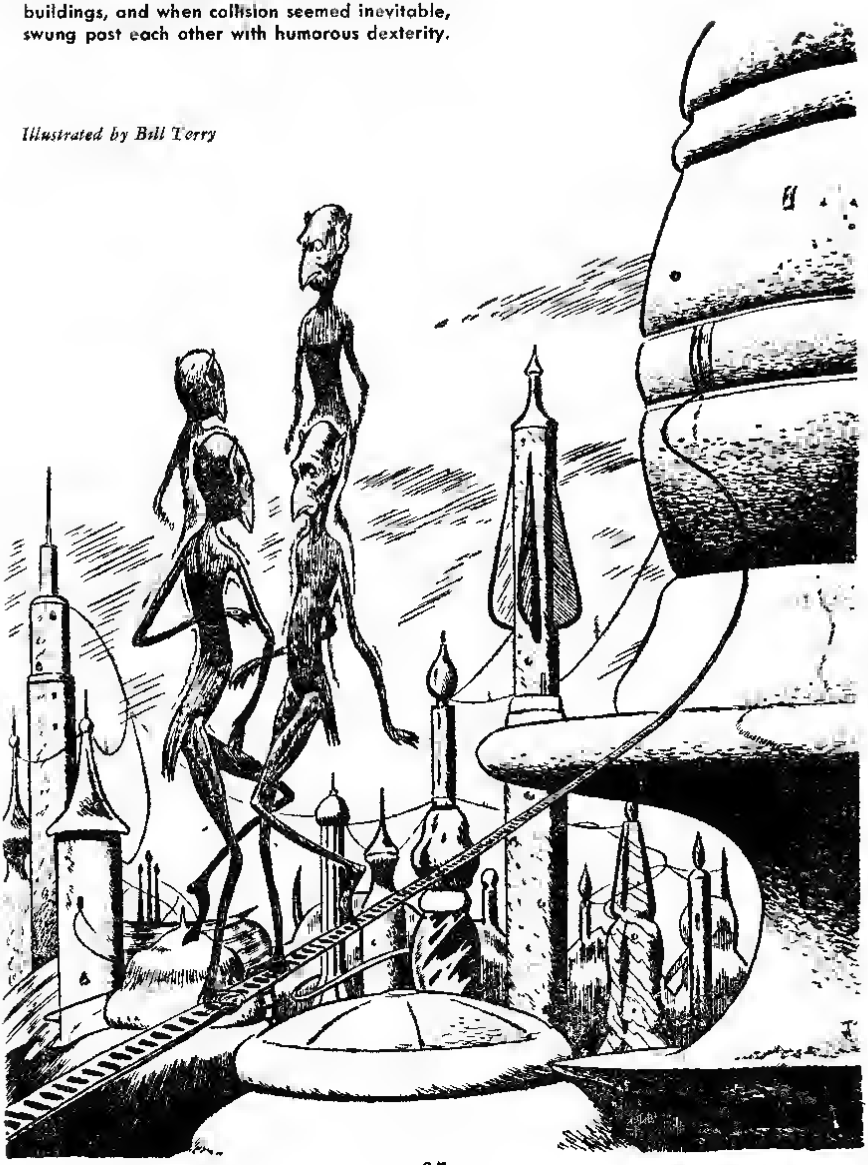
Korita half-turned away, then said, "I know what you mean by odds and ends. For instance, I've learned just enough about Nexialism to envy you the mind trainings you received."

At that moment, it happened — Grosvenor had noticed absently that the ship was almost through the small star cluster it had been traversing. Only a score of suns were still visible of the approximately five thousand stars that made up the system. The cluster was one of a hundred star groups accompanying Earth's galaxy through space.

Grosvenor parted his lips to say, "I'd certainly like to talk to you

Two of the birdlike people of Riim approached one another along the narrow bridges between buildings, and when collision seemed inevitable, swung past each other with humorous dexterity.

Illustrated by Bill Terry



again, Mr. Korita." — He didn't say it. A slightly blurred double image of a woman wearing a feathered hat was taking form in the glass directly in front of him. The image flickered and shimmered. Grosvenor felt an unnormal tensing of the muscles of his eyes. For a moment, his mind went blank. That was followed rapidly by sounds, flashes of light, a sharp sensation of pain — hypnotic hallucinations! The awareness was like an electric shock. The recognition saved him. He whirled, stumbled over the unconscious body of Korita, and then he was racing along the corridor.

As he ran, he had to look ahead in order to see his way. And yet, he had to keep blinking to break the pattern of the light flashes that came at his eyes from other images on the walls. At first, it seemed to him that the images were everywhere. Then, he noticed that the woman-like shapes — some oddly double, some single — occupied transparent or translucent wall sections. There were hundreds of such reflecting areas, but at least it was a limitation. At least he knew where he had to run fastest, and where he could slow down.

He saw more men. They lay at uneven intervals along his line of flight. Twice, he came upon conscious men. One stood in his path with unseeing eyes, and did not move or turn as Grosvenor sped by. The other man let out a yell, grabbed his vihrator, and fired it. The tracer beam flashed on the wall beside Grosvenor. Grosvenor whirled, and lunged forward, knocking the man to the floor. The man — a Kent supporter — glared at him malignantly. "You damned spy!" he said harshly. "We'll get you yet." Grosvenor didn't pause. He reached his own department safely, and immediately took refuge in the film recording room. There he turned a barrage of flashing lights against the floors, the walls and the ceiling. The images were instantly eclipsed by the strong light superimposed upon them.

Quickly, Grosvenor set to work. One fact was already evident. This was mechanical visual hypnosis of such power that he had saved himself only by keeping his eyes averted, but what had happened was not limited to vision. The image had tried to control him by stimulating his brain through his eyes. He was up to date on most of the work that men had done in that field, and so he knew — though the attacker apparently did not — that control by an alien of a human nervous system was not possible except with an encephalo-adjuster or its equivalent.

He could only guess, from what had almost happened to him, that the other men had been precipitated into deep sleep trances, or else they were confused by hallucinations and were not responsible for their actions. His hope was that the woman-like beings — the enemy seemed to be feminine — were operating at a distance of several light years and so would be unable to refine their attempts at domination.

His job was to get to the control room and turn on the ship's energy

screen. No matter where the attack was coming from, whether from another ship or actually from a planet, the energy screen should effectively cut off any carrier beams they might be sending.

With frantic fingers, Grosvenor worked to set up a mobile unit of lights. He needed something that would interfere with the images on his way to the control room. He was making the final connection when he felt an unmistakable sensation, a slight giddy feeling — that passed almost instantly. Such feelings usually occurred during a considerable change of course and were a result of readjustment of the anti-accelerators. Had the course actually been changed? He couldn't stop to make sure. Hastily, Grosvenor carried his arrangement of lights to a power-driven loading vehicle in a nearby corridor, and placed it in the rear compartment. Then he climbed on and headed for the elevators.

He guessed that altogether ten minutes had gone by since he had first seen the image.

He took the turn into the elevator corridor at twenty-five miles an hour, which was fast for these comparatively narrow spaces. In the alcove opposite the elevators, two men were wrestling each other with a life and death concentration. They paid no attention to Grosvenor but swayed and strained and cursed. Their labored breathing was a loud sound in the confined area. Their single-minded hatred of each other was not affected by Grosvenor's arrangement of lights. Whatever world of hallucination they were in, it had "taken" profoundly.

Grosvenor whirled his machine into the nearest elevator and started down. He was beginning to let himself hope that he might find the control room deserted. The hope died as he came to the main corridor. It swarmed with men. Barricades had been flung up, and there was an unmistakable odor of ozone. Vibrators fumed and fussed. Grosvenor peered cautiously out of the elevator, trying to size up the situation. It was visibly bad. The two approaches to the control room were blocked by scores of overturned loading-mules. Behind them crouched men in military uniform. Grosvenor caught a glimpse of Captain Leeth among the defenders and, on the far side, he saw Director Morton behind the barricade of one of the attacking groups. That clarified the picture slightly. Suppressed hostility had been stimulated by the images. The scientists were fighting the military whom they had always unconsciously hated. The military, in turn, was suddenly freed to vent its contempt and fury upon the despised scientists.

It was, Grosvenor knew, not a true picture of their feeling for each other. The human mind normally balanced innumerable opposing impulses so that the average individual might live his life-span without letting one feeling gain important ascendancy over the others. That intricate balance had now been upset. The result threatened disaster to an entire expedition of human beings, and promised victory to an enemy whose purpose could only be conjectured. What-

ever the reason, the way to the control room was blocked. Reluctantly, Grosvenor retreated again to his own department.

Carefully, but quickly, he tuned a wall communicator plate to the finely balanced steering devices in the fore part of the *Space Beagle*. The sending plate there was focussed directly along a series of hair-line sights. The arrangement looked more intricate than it was. As he brought his eyes to the sights, Grosvenor saw that the ship was describing a slow curve which, at its climax, would bring it to bear directly on a bright white star. A servo-mechanism had been set up to make periodic adjustments that would hold it on its course.

Still he was more puzzled than alarmed. He shifted the viewer over to the bank of supplementary instruments. According to the star's spectral type, magnitude and luminosity, it was just over four light-years distant. The ship's speed was up to a light year every five hours. Since it was still accelerating, that would increase on a calculable curve. He estimated roughly that the vessel would reach the vicinity of the sun in approximately eleven hours. Grosvenor's thought suffered a pause at that point. With a jerky movement, he shut off the communicator. He stood there, shocked, but not incredulous. Destruction *could* be the purpose of the deluded person who had altered the ship's course. If so, there was just about ten hours in which to prevent catastrophe.

Even at that moment, when he had no clear plan, it seemed to Grosvenor that only an attack on the enemy, using hypnotic techniques, would effectively do the job. Meanwhile —

He stood up decisively. It was time for his second attempt to get into the control room.

He needed something that would cause direct stimulation to brain cells. There were several devices that could do that. Most of them were usable for medical purposes only. The exception was the encephalo-adjuster. Though important medically, it had other uses as well. It took Grosvenor several minutes to set up one of his adjusters. Testing it consumed still more time; and, because it was such a delicate machine, he had to fasten it to his loading vehicle with a cushion of springs around it. Altogether, the preparation required thirty-seven minutes.

The presence of the encephalo-adjuster made it necessary for him to keep down the speed of his vehicle as he headed for the control room. The enforced slow-down irked him, but it also gave him an opportunity to observe the changes that had taken place since the first moment of attack. He saw only an occasional unconscious body. Grosvenor guessed that most of the men who had fallen into deep trance sleeps had awakened spontaneously. Such awakenings were a common hypnotic phenomenon. Now they were responding to other stimuli on the same chance basis. Unfortunately — although that also was to be expected — it seemed to mean that long-suppressed impulses controlled their actions.

A highly developed mind — human or alien — was a built-up structure, an intricate balance of positive and negative excitations. The more superficial impulses, having considerable freedom of expression at all times, could not endanger the whole structure. The suppressed impulses, suddenly given free rein, acted like water breaking through a dam. So men who, under normal circumstances merely disliked each other mildly, all in an instant had their dislike change to a murderous hatred. The deadly factor was that they would be unaware of the change. For the mind *could* be tangled without the individual being aware of it. It could be tangled by bad environmental association, or by the attack that was now being made against a ship-load of men. In either case, each person carried on as if his new beliefs were as soundly based as his old ones.

Grosvenor opened the elevator door on the control room level, and then drew back hastily. A heat projector was pouring flame along the corridor, the metal walls burning with a harsh, sizzling sound. Within his narrow field of vision, three men lay dead. As he waited, there was a thunderous explosion, and instantly, the flames stopped, blue smoke hazed the air, and there was a sense of suffocating heat. Within seconds, both the haze and the heat were gone. The ventilating system was still working.

He peered out cautiously. At first sight, the corridor seemed deserted. Then he saw Morton, half-hidden in a protective alcove less than a score of feet away, and at almost the same moment, the Director saw him and beckoned him over. Grosvenor hesitated, then realized he had to take the risk. He pushed his vehicle through the elevator doorway, and darted across the intervening space. The Director greeted him eagerly as he came up.

"You're just the man I want to see," he said. "We've got to get control of the ship away from Captain Leeth before Kent and his group organize their attack."

Morton's gaze was calm and intelligent. He had the look of a man fighting for the right. Nor did it seem to occur to him that an explanation for his statement was required. The Director went on:

"We'll need your help, particularly against Kent. They're bringing up some chemical stuff I've never seen before. So far, our fans have blown it right back at them, but they're setting up fans of their own. Our big problem is, will we have time to defeat Leeth before Kent can bring his forces to bear?"

Time was also Grosvenor's problem. Unobtrusively, he brought his right hand up to his left wrist and touched the activating relay that controlled the directional sending plates of the adjuster. He pointed the plates at Morton as he said, "I've got a plan, sir, and I think it might be effective against the enemy."

He stopped. Morton was looking down. The Director said, "You've brought along an adjuster, and it's on. What do you expect from that?"

Grosvenor's first tense reaction yielded to a need for a suitable an-

swer. He had hoped that Morton would not be too familiar with adjusters. With that hope blasted, he could still try to use the instrument, though without the initial advantage of surprise. He said in a voice that was taut in spite of himself, "That's it. It's this machine I want to use."

Morton hesitated, then said, "I gather from the thoughts coming into my mind that you're broadcasting—" He stopped. Interest quickened in his face. "Say," he said presently, "that's good. If you can put over the notion that we're being attacked by aliens—" He broke off. His lips pursed. His eyes narrowed with calculation. He said, "Captain Leeth has twice tried to make a deal with me. Now, we'll pretend to agree, and you go over with your machine. We'll attack the moment you signal us." He explained with dignity, "You understand, I would not consider dealing with either Kent or Captain Leeth except as a means to victory. You appreciate that, I hope?"

Grosvenor found Captain Leeth in the control room. The commander greeted him with stiff-backed friendliness. "This fight among the scientists," he said earnestly, "has placed the military in an awkward position. We've got to defend the control room and the engine room and so perform our minimum duty to the expedition as a whole." He shook his head gravely. "It's out of the question, of course, that either of them be allowed to win. In the final issue, we of the military are prepared to sacrifice ourselves to prevent the victory of either group."

The explanation startled Grosvenor out of his own purpose. He had been wondering if Captain Leeth was responsible for aiming the ship directly at a sun. Here was at least partial confirmation. The commander's motivation seemed to be that victory for any group but the military was unthinkable. With that beginning, it was probably only a tiny step to the concept that the whole expedition must be sacrificed. Unsuspected hypnosis had stimulated the step.

Casually, Grosvenor pointed the directional sender of the adjuster at Captain Leeth. . . . Brain waves. minute pulsations transmitted from axon to dendrite, from dendrite to axon, always following a previously established path depending on past associations — a process that operated endlessly among the ninety million neuron cells of a human brain. Each cell was in its own state of electro-colloidal balance, an intricate interplay of tension and impulse. Only gradually, over the years, had machines been developed that could detect with some degree of accuracy the meaning of the energy flow inside the brain.

The earliest encephalo-adjuster was an indirect descendant of the famous electro-encephalograph. But its function was the reverse of that first device. It manufactured artificial brain waves of any desired pattern. Using it, a skillful operator could stimulate any part of the brain, and so cause thoughts, emotions, and dreams, and bring up memories from the individual's past. It was not in itself a controlling instrument. The

subject maintained his own ego. However, it could transmit the mind-impulses of one person to a second person. Since the impulses varied according to the sender's thoughts, the recipient was stimulated in a highly flexible fashion.

Unaware of the presence of the adjuster, Captain Leeth did not realize that his thoughts were no longer quite his own. He said, "The attack being made on the ship by the images makes the quarrel of the scientists traitorous and unforgivable." He paused, then said thoughtfully, "Here's my plan." The plan involved heat projectors, muscle-straining acceleration, and partial extermination of both groups of scientists. Captain Leeth failed even to mention the aliens, nor did it seem to occur to him that he was describing his intentions to an emissary of what he regarded as the enemy. He finished, "Where your services will be important, Mr. Grosvenor, is in the science department. As a Nexialist, with a coordinative knowledge of many sciences, you can play a decisive role against the other scientists—"

Weary and disheartened, Grosvenor gave up. The chaos was too great for one man to overcome. Everywhere he looked were armed men. Altogether, he had seen a score or more dead bodies. At any moment the uneasy truce between Captain Leeth and Director Morton would end in a burst of projector fire. And even now he could hear the roaring of the fans where Morton was holding off Kent's attack. He sighed as he turned back to the Captain. "I'll need some equipment from my own department," he said. "Can you pass me through to the rear elevators? I can be back here in five minutes."

As he guided his machine into the backdoor of his department a few minutes later, it seemed to Grosvenor that there was no longer any doubt about what he must do. What had seemed a far-fetched idea when he first thought of it was now the only plan he had left. He must attack the alien women through their myriad images, and with their own hypnotic weapons.

As he made his preparations, Grosvenor kept wiping the perspiration from his face, and yet it was not warm. The room temperature stood at normal. Unwillingly, he paused finally to analyze his anxiety. He just didn't, he decided, know enough about the enemy. It was not sufficient that he had a theory about how they were operating. The great mystery was an enemy who had curiously woman-like faces and bodies, some partly doubled, some single. Uneasily, Grosvenor tried to imagine how Korita might analyze what was happening. In terms of cyclic history, what stage of culture could these beings be in? — The fellabin stage, he thought finally. It was actually an inevitable conclusion. A race that controlled hypnotic phenomena as did this one, would be able to stimulate each other's minds, and so would have naturally the kind of telepathy that human beings could obtain only through the encephalo-adjuster. Such beings would flash through the early

stages of their culture, and arrive at the fellah stage in the swiftest possible time. *The ability to read minds without artificial aids would stultify any culture.*

Swiftly, Grosvenor went back mentally to the various civilizations of Earth history that had run their courses, apparently exhausted themselves, and then stagnated into fellahdom — Babylon, Egypt, China, Greece, Rome, and parts of west Europe. Then there were the Mayan, Toltec and Aztec cultures of early America, the East Indies, Ceylon and the mid-Pacific islanders, with their strange relics of by-gone glories — endlessly, the pattern repeated itself. Fellah folk resented newness and change, resisted it, and fought it blindly. The coming of this ship could have stirred these beings to just that kind of resistance. It seemed to Grosvenor that he had to act as if the analysis was correct. He had no other hypothesis. With such a theory as a starting point, he could try to obtain verification from one of the images. With pursed lips, he considered how it might be done. They wanted to conquer him also, of that he was sure, so accordingly, he must appear to play into their hands. A quick glance at the chronometer tensed him, as he saw he had less than seven hours to save the ship!

Hastily, he focused a beam of light through the encephalo-adjuster. With quick movements, he set a screen in front of the light, so that a small area of glass was thrown into shadow except for the intermittent light that played on it from the adjuster.

Instantly, an image appeared. It was one of the partially doubled ones, and because of the encephalo-adjuster, he was able to study it in safety. That first clear look astounded him. It was only vaguely humanoid, and yet it was understandable how his mind had leaped to the woman identification earlier. Its overlapping double face was crowned with a neat bun of golden feathers, but its head, though unmistakably bird-like now, did have a human appearance. There were no feathers on its face, which was covered with a lacework of what seemed to be veins. The human appearance resulted from the way those veins had formed into groups. They gave the effect of cheeks and nose. The second pair of eyes, and the second mouth, were in each case nearly two inches above the first. They almost made a second head, which was literally growing out of the first. There was also a second pair of shoulders, with a doubled pair of short arms that ended in beautifully delicate, amazingly long hands and fingers—and the over-all effect was still feminine. Grosvenor found himself thinking that the arms and fingers of the two bodies would be likely to separate first; then the second body would be able to help support its weight. Parthenogenesis, he thought. Here were genuine hymenopters.

The image in the wall before him showed vestigial wings, and tufts of feathers were visible at the wrists. It wore a bright blue tunic over an astonishingly straight and superficial-

ly human-like body. If there were other vestiges of a feathery past, they were hidden by the clothing. What was clear was that this bird didn't and couldn't fly under its own power.

Grosvenor completed his study swiftly. His first move seemed as obvious as it was necessary. Somehow, he must convey to these beings that he would let himself be hypnotized in exchange for information. Tentatively, he drew a picture of the image and of himself on a blackboard. Forty-seven precious minutes and scores of drawings later, the "bird" image suddenly faded from the wall. And a city scene appeared in its place. It was not a large community, and his first view of it was from a high vantage point. He had an impression of very tall, very narrow buildings clustered so close together that all the lower reaches must be lost in gloom for most of each day. Grosvenor wondered, in passing, if that might possibly reflect nocturnal habits in some primeval past. His mind leaped on. He ignored individual buildings in his desire to obtain a whole picture. Above everything else, he wanted to find out the extent of their machine culture, how they communicated. and if this was the city from which the attack on the ship was being launched.

He could see no machines, no aircraft, no cars, nor anything corresponding to the interstellar communication equipment used by human beings. On Earth, such communication required stations spaced over many square miles of land. It seemed likely, therefore, that this was not the origin of the attack. He had guessed, of course, that they would not show him anything vital. Even as he made his negative discovery, the view changed. He was no longer on a hill, but on a building near the center of the city. Whatever was taking that perfect color picture moved forward, and he looked down over the edge. His primary concern was with the whole scene. Yet he found himself wondering how they were showing it to him. The transition from one scene to another had been accomplished in the twinkling of an eye. Less than a minute had passed since his blackboard illustration had finally made known his desire for information.

That thought, like the others, was a flashing one. Even as he had it, he was gazing avidly down the side of the building. The space separating it from the nearby structures seemed no more than ten feet. But now he saw something that had not been visible from the hillside. The buildings were connected on every level by walks only inches wide. Along these moved the pedestrian traffic of the bird city. Directly below Grosvenor, two individuals strode towards each other along the same narrow walk, seemingly unconcerned by the fact that it was a hundred feet or more to the ground. They passed casually, easily. Each swung his outside leg wide around the other, caught the walk, bent his inside leg far out, and then they were by, without having broken pace. There were other people on other levels going through the same

intricate maneuvers in the same nonchalant manner. Watching them, Grosvenor guessed that their bones were thin and hollow, and that they were lightly built.

The scene changed again, and then again. It moved from one section of the street to another. He saw, it seemed to him, every possible variation of the reproductive condition. Some were so far advanced that the legs and arms and most of the body were free. Others were as he had already seen them. In every instance, the "parent" seemed unaffected by the weight of the new body.

Grosvenor was trying to get a glimpse inside one of the dim interiors of a building when the picture began to fade from the wall. In a moment, the city had disappeared completely. In its place grew the double image. The image-fingers pointed at the encephalo-adjuster. Its motion was unmistakable. It had fulfilled its part of the bargain. It was time for him to fulfill his. Its naive expectation that he would do so was typically fellah. Unfortunately, he had no alternative but to carry out his "obligation."

"I am calm and relaxed," said Grosvenor's recorded voice. "My thoughts are clear. What I see is not necessarily related to what I am looking at. What I hear may be meaningless to the interpretive centers of my brain, but I have seen their city as they think it is. Whether what I actually see and hear makes sense or nonsense, I remain calm, relaxed, and at ease . . ."

Grosvenor listened carefully to the words, and then nodded. The time might come, of course, when he would not consciously hear the message. But it would be there. Its patterns would impress ever more firmly on his mind. Still listening, he examined the adjuster for the last time, and all was as he wanted it. Carefully, he set the automatic cut-off for five hours. At the end of that time, unless he were dead, the limited cross connection would be broken. He would have preferred his first break to be in seconds, or minutes, but what he was about to do was not merely a scientific experiment — it was a life and death gamble. Ready for action, he put his hand on the control dial, and there he paused. For this was the moment. Within a few seconds the group mind of perhaps thousands of individual birdfolk would be in "possession" of parts of his nervous system. They would undoubtedly try to control him as they were controlling the other men on the ship.

He was fairly positive that he would be up against a group of minds working together. He had seen no machines; not even a wheeled vehicle, that most primitive of mechanical devices. For a short time, he had taken it for granted that they were using television-type cameras. Now, he guessed that he had seen the city through the eyes of individuals, as with these beings, telepathy was a sensory process as sharp as vision itself. The enmassed mindpower of millions of bird-people could hurdle light years of distance. They didn't need machines.

On Earth, and elsewhere, nearly all lower order life forms that reproduced by parthenogenesis worked together in a curious unity of purpose. It suggested an interrelation that could dispense with actual physical contact.

Fellahdom must be a long standing condition of this race. There would be no doubt in the mind of the individual about the "truth" of what it saw and heard and felt. It would be only too easy for them to settle into an inflexible pattern of existence. That pattern was now going to feel the sledge-hammer impact of new ideas. He couldn't hope to foresee the result.

Still listening to the recorder, Grosvenor manipulated the dial of the encephalo-adjuster, and slightly modified the rhythm of his own thoughts. It had to be slight. Even if he had wanted to, he could not offer the aliens complete attunement. In those rhythmic pulsations lay every variation of sanity, unsanity, and insanity. He had to restrict his reception to waves that would register "sane" on a psychologist's graph.

The adjuster superimposed them on a beam of light which in turn shone directly on the image. If the individual "behind" the image was affected by the pattern in the light, it didn't show it yet. Grosvenor did not expect overt evidence, and so he was not disappointed. He was convinced that the result would become apparent only in the changes that occurred in the patterns they were directing at him. And that, he was sure, he would have to experience with his own nervous system.

It was hard for him to concentrate on the image, but he persisted. The encephalo-adjuster began to interfere markedly with his vision, and still he stared steadily at the image.

". . . I am calm and relaxed. My thoughts are clear . . ."

One instant the words were loud in his ears, and the next, they were gone. In their stead was a roaring sound as of distant thunder.

The noise faded slowly. It became a steady throbbing like the murmur in a large sea shell. Grosvenor was aware of a faint light. It was far away, and had the hazy dimness of a lamp seen through thick fog.

"I'm still in control," he assured himself. "I'm getting sense impressions through its nervous system. It's getting impressions through mine."

He could wait. He could sit here and wait until the darkness cleared, until his brain started to make some kind of interpretation of the sense phenomena that were being telegraphed from that other nervous system. He could sit here and—

He stopped. "Sit!" he thought. Was that what *it* was doing? He poised intent and alert. He heard a distant voice say, "Whether what I actually see and hear makes sense or nonsense, I remain calm—" The sound of his recorded voice relieved him anew. The danger would come if his body were forced away from that reassuring sound, and away from the encephalo-adjuster. Until that

threatened, he could let the alien impressions seep into him.

His nose began to itch. He thought: "They don't have noses; at least I didn't see any. Therefore, it's either my own nose, or a random stimulation." He started to reach up to scratch it, and felt a sharp pain in his stomach. He would have doubled up with the hurt of it if he had been able. He couldn't. He couldn't scratch his nose or put his hands on his abdomen.

He realized then that the itch and the pain stimuli did not derive from his own body, nor did they necessarily have any corresponding meaning in the other's nervous system. Two highly developed life forms were sending signals to each other — he hoped that he was sending signals to it also—which neither could interpret. His advantage was that he had expected it. The alien, if it was fellah, and if Korita's theory was valid, hadn't and couldn't expect it. Understanding that, *he* could hope for adjustment. *It* could only become more confused.

The itch went away, and the pain in his stomach became a feeling of satiation, as if he had eaten too much. A hot needle stabbed at his spine, digging at each vertebra. Half way down, the needle turned to ice, and the ice melted and ran in a freezing stream down his back. Something—a hand? a piece of metal? a pair of tongs?—snatched at a bundle of muscles in his arm, and almost tore them out by the roots. His mind shrieked with pain messages and he almost lost consciousness.

Grosvenor was a badly shaken man when that sensation faded into nothingness. These were all illusions. No such things were happening anywhere, not in his body, not in that of the bird-being. His brain was receiving a pattern of impulses through his eyes, and was misinterpreting them. In such a relationship, pleasure could become pain, any stimulus could produce any feeling. He hadn't counted on the misinterpretations being so violent.

He forgot that as his lips were caressed by something soft and squishy. A voice said, "I am loved—" Grosvenor rejected the meaning. "No, not loved." It was, he believed, his own brain again trying to interpret sense phenomena from a nervous system that was experiencing a reaction different from any comparable human emotion. Consciously, he substituted the words: "I am stimulated by . . ."—and then let the feeling run its course. In the end, he still didn't know what it was that he had felt. The stimulation was not unpleasant. His taste buds were titillated by a sense of sweetness, and his eyes watered. It was a relaxing process. A picture of a flower came into his mind. It was a lovely, red, Earth carnation, and thus could have no connection with the flora of the Riim world. "Riim!" He thought. His mind poised in tense fascination. Had that come to him across the gulf of space? In some irrational way, the name seemed to fit. Yet no matter what came through, a doubt would remain in his mind.

The final series of sensations had

all been pleasant. Nevertheless, he waited anxiously for the next manifestation. The light remained dim and hazy—then, once more his eyes seemed to water, his feet suddenly itched intensely. The sensation passed, leaving him unaccountably hot, and weighted by a suffocating lack of air.

"False!" he told himself. "Nothing like that is happening."

The stimulations ceased. Again there was only the steady throbbing sound, and the all-pervasive blur of light. It began to worry him. It was possible that his method was right and that, given time, he would eventually be able to exercise some control over a member, or a group of members of the enemy. Time was what he could not spare. Every passing second brought him a colossal distance nearer personal destruction. Out there—here (for an instant he was confused)—in space, one of the biggest and costliest ships ever built by men was devouring the miles at a velocity that had almost no meaning.

He knew which parts of his brain were being stimulated. He could hear a noise only when sensitive areas at the side of the cortex received sensations. The brain surface above the ear, when titillated, produced dreams and old memories. In the same way, every part of the human brain had long ago been mapped. The exact location of stimulation areas differed slightly for each individual, but the general structure, among humans, was always the same.

The normal human eye was a fairly objective mechanism. The lens focussed a real image on the retina. Judging by the pictures of their city, as transmitted by the Riim-folk, they also possessed objectively accurate eyes. If he could coordinate his visual centers with their eyes, he would receive dependable pictures.

More minutes went by. He thought, in sudden despair: "Is it possible that I'm going to sit here the full five hours without ever making a useful contact?" For the first time, he questioned his good sense in committing himself so completely to this situation. When he tried to move his hand over to the control lever of the encephalo-adjuster, nothing seemed to happen. A number of vagrant sensations came among them, unmistakably, the odor of burning rubber. For a third time, his eyes watered. And then, sharp and clear, a picture came. It flashed off as swiftly as it had flashed on. To Grosvenor, who had been trained by advanced tachistoscopic techniques, the after-image remained as vivid in his mind as if he had had a leisurely look. It seemed as if he were in one of the tall, narrow buildings. The interior was dimly lighted by the reflections from the sunlight that came through the open doors, as there were no windows. Instead of floors, the "residence" was fitted with catwalks. A few bird people were sitting on these walks. The walls were lined with doors, indicating the existence of cabinets and storage areas.

The visualization both excited and disturbed him. Suppose he did establish a relationship whereby he

was affected by its nervous system, and it by his. Suppose he reached the point where he could hear with its ears, see with its eyes, and feel to some degree what it felt. These were sensory impressions only. Could he hope to bridge the gap, and induce motor responses in the creature's muscles? Would he be able to force it to walk, turn its head, move its arms, and, generally, make it act as his body? The attack on the ship was being made by a group working together, thinking together, feeling together. By gaining control of one member of such a group, could he exercise some control over all?

His momentary vision must have come through the eyes of one individual. What he had experienced so far did not suggest any kind of group contact. He was like a man imprisoned in a dark room with a hole in the wall in front of him covered with layers of translucent material. Through this filtered a vague light. Occasionally, images penetrated the blur, and he had glimpses of the outside world. He could be fairly certain that the pictures were accurate, but that did not apply to the sounds that came through another hole on a side wall, or the sensations that came to him through still other holes in the ceiling and floor.

Humans could hear frequencies up to 20,000 a second. That was where some races started to hear. Under hypnosis, men could be conditioned to laugh uproariously when they were being tortured, and shriek with pain when tickled. Stimulation that meant pain to one life form, could mean nothing at all to another.

Mentally, Grosvenor let the tensions seep out of him. There was nothing for him to do but to relax and wait. He waited.

It occurred to him presently that there might be a connection between his own thoughts and the sensations he received. That picture of the inside of the building—what had he thought just before it came? Principally, he recalled, he had visualized the structure of the eye. The connection was so obvious that his mind trembled with excitement. There was another thing, also. Until now, he had concentrated on the notion of seeing and feeling with the nervous system of the individual. Still the realization of his hopes depended on his establishing contact with, and control of, the group of minds that had attacked the ship.

He saw his problem, suddenly, as one that would require control of his own brain. Certain areas would have to be virtually blacked out, kept at minimum performance levels. Others must be made extremely sensitive, so that all incoming sensations found it easier to seek expression through them. As a highly trained auto-hypnotic subject, he could accomplish both objectives by suggestion. Vision came first, of course. Then muscular control of the individual, through whom the group was working against him.

Flashes of colored light interrupted his concentration. Grosvenor regarded them as evidence of the effectiveness of his suggestions. He knew

that he was on the right track when his vision cleared suddenly, and stayed clear. The scene was the same. His control still sat on one of the roosts inside one of the tall buildings. Hoping fervently that the vision was not going to fade, Grosvenor began to concentrate on moving the Riim's muscles. The trouble was that the ultimate explanation of why a movement could occur at all was obscure. His visualization had to be on a level that was already gross. Nothing happened. Shocked but determined, Grosvenor tried symbol hypnosis, using a single cue word to cover the entire complex process.

Slowly, one of the attenuated arms came up. Another cue, and his control stood up cautiously. Then he made it turn its head. The act of looking reminded the bird-being that that drawer and that cabinet and that closet were "mine." The memory barely touched the conscious level. The creature knew its own possessions and accepted the fact without concern.

Grosvenor had a hard time fighting down his excitement. With tense patience, he had the bird-being get up from a sitting position, raise its arms, lower them, and walk back and forth along the roost. Finally, he made it sit down again. He must have been keyed up, his brain responsive to the slightest suggestion. Because he had barely started to concentrate again when his whole being was flooded by a message that seemed to affect every level of his thought and feeling. More or less automatically, Grosvenor translated the anguished thoughts into familiar verbalisms.

". . . The cells are calling, calling. The cells are afraid. Oh, the cells know pain! There is darkness in the Riim world. Withdraw from the being—far from Riim . . . Shadows, darkness, turmoil . . . The cells must reject him . . . but they cannot. They were right to try to destroy the being who came out of the great dark. The night deepens. All cells withdraw . . . but they cannot . . ."

Grosvenor thought exultantly: "I've got them!" After a minute of tremendous excitement, he grew sober. His problem was greater than theirs. If he broke his connection with them, they would be free. By avoiding him thereafter, they could go on to achieve the purpose of their disruptive attack . . . destruction of the *Space Beagle*. He would still have the problem of overcoming Morton and the others. He had no alternative but to go on with his plan.

He concentrated first on what seemed the most logical intermediate stage:—the transfer of control to another alien. The choice, in the case of these beings, was obvious.

"I am loved!" he told himself, deliberately producing the sensation which had confused him earlier. "I am loved by my parent body, from which I am growing to wholeness. I share my parent's thoughts, but already I see with my own eyes, and know that I am one of the group . . ."

The transition came suddenly, as Grosvenor had expected it might. He moved the smaller, duplicate fingers. He arched the fragile shoulders.

Then he oriented himself again to the parent Riim. The experiment was so completely satisfactory that he felt ready for the bigger jump that would take him into association with the nervous system of a more distant alien. That, also, proved to be a matter of stimulating the proper brain centers. Grosvenor came to awareness standing in a wilderness of brush and hill. Directly in front of him was a narrow stream, and beyond it, an orange sun rode low in a dark purple sky that was spotted with fleecy clouds. Grosvenor made his new control turn completely around. He saw that a small roost building, the only habitation in sight, nestled among the trees farther along the stream. He walked toward the building and looked inside. In the dim interior, he made out several roosts, one with two birds sitting on it, both with eyes closed. It was quite possible, he decided, that they were participating in the group assault on the *Space Beagle*.

From there, by a variation of the stimulus, he transferred his control to an individual on a part of the planet where it was night. The transition this time was even faster. He was in a lightless city, with ghostly buildings and catwalks. Swiftly, Grosvenor moved on to association with other nervous systems. He had no clear idea why the "rapport" was established with one Riim, and not with another who fitted the same general requirement. It could be that the stimulations affected some individuals slightly faster than it affected others. It was even possible that these were descendants or body-relatives of his original parent-control. When he had been associated with more than two dozen Riim all over the planet, it seemed to Grosvenor that he had a good, over-all impression.

It was a world of brick and stone and wood, and of a neuralogical community relationship that would probably never be surpassed. A race had by-passed the entire machine-age of man, with its penetration of the secrets of matter and energy. Now, he felt, he could safely take the next-to-the-last step of his counter-attack. He concentrated on a pattern which would characterize one of the beings who had projected an image to the *Space Beagle*. (He had, then, a sense of a small but noticeable lapse of time.) Then he was looking forth from one of the images, seeing the ship through an image.

His first concern was with how the battle was progressing, but he had to restrain his will to know because to come aboard was only part of his necessary pre-conditioning. He wanted to affect a group of perhaps millions of individuals, and had to affect them so powerfully that they would have to withdraw from the *Space Beagle*, and have no recourse but to stay away from it.

He had proved that he could receive their thoughts, and that they could receive his. His association with one nervous system after another would not have been possible unless that was so. Now he was ready. He thought into the darkness:

"You live in a Universe; and within you, you form pictures of the Uni-

verse as it seems to you. Of that Universe you know nothing and can know nothing except for the pictures, hut the pictures within you of the Universe are not the Universe . . ."

How could you influence another's mind?—By changing his assumptions. How could you alter another's actions?—By changing his hasic beliefs, his emotional certainties.

Carefully, Grosvenor went on: "And the pictures within you do not show all ahout the Universe, for there are many things which you cannot know directly, not having senses to know. Within the Universe there is an order, and if the order of the pictures within you is not as the order of the Universe, then you are deceived . . ."

In the history of life, few thinking beings had ever done anything illogical—within their frame of reference. If the frame was falsely based, if the assumptions were untrue to reality, then the individual's automatic logic could lead him to disastrous conclusions.

The assumptions had to be changed. Grosvenor changed them, deliberately, coolly, honestly. His own basic hypothesis behind what he was doing was that the Riim had no defense. These were the first new ideas they had had in countless generations and he did not douht that the impact would be colossal. This was a fellah civilization, rooted in certainties that had never before been challenged. There was ample historical evidence that a tiny intruder could influence decisively the future of entire fellahin races.

Huge old India had crumhled before a few thousand Englishmen. Similarly, all the fellah peoples of ancient Earth were taken over with ease, and did not revive till the core of their inflexible attitudes was forever shattered by the dawning realization that there was more to life than they had been taught under their rigid systems. The Riim were peculiarly vulnerahle. Their method of communication, unique and wonderful though it was, made it possihle to influence them all in a single intensive operation. Over and over, Grosvenor repeated his message, adding, each time, one instruction that had to do with the ship. The instruction was:

"Change the pattern you are using against those on the ship, and then withdraw it. Change the pattern, so that they can relax, and sleep . . . then withdraw it . . . do not attack again . . ."

He had only a vague notion as to how long he actually poured his commands into that tremendous neural circuit. He guessed ahout two hours. Whatever the time involved, it ended as the relay switch on the encephaloadjuster automatically hroke the connection between himself and the image in the wall of his department. Ahruptly, he was aware of the familiar surroundings of his own department. He glanced at where the image had heen and tensed as he saw that it was still there, but shook his head slightly. He could hardly expect a definite reaction this soon. The Riim, also, were recovering from a connection that had

just been broken.

As Grosvenor watched, the pattern of light from the image changed subtly. Grosvenor's head drooped sleepily. He sat up jerkily, remembering. The instructions he had given—to relax and sleep—this was the result. All over the ship, men would be sleeping as the new hypnotic pattern extended its inhibitory paralysis over the hemispheres of the brain.

About three minutes went by. Suddenly, the double image of the Riim vanished from the glistening wall in front of him. A moment later, Grosvenor was out in the corridor. As he raced along, he saw that unconscious men lay everywhere but that the walls were bright and clear, Not once on his journey to the control room did he see an image.

Inside the control room, he stepped gingerly over the sleeping form of Captain Leeth, who lay on the floor near the control panel. With a sigh of relief, Grosvenor threw the switch that energized the outer screen of the ship.

Seconds later, Elliott Grosvenor was in the control chair, altering the course of the *Space Beagle.*

THE END

REVIEWS OF CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS

SPACE CADET, by Robert Heinlein. Scribner's, New York, $2.50. Reviewed by Forrest J. Ackerman.

When "Rocket Ship *Galileo,*" a *new* Heinlein book, appeared out of the blue, fans were excited and eager. The enthusiasm quickly dissipated, however, when it was learned that the book ($2.50, Scribner's) was a juvenile, albeit Heinlein hungry fans who read it reported very favorably on the volume, praising its adult approach It was not too surprising to old acquaintances of Heinlein that he had done a creditable job on a space operetta, for it had long been an ambition of his to bring Tom Swift up-to-date.

But when, similarly unheralded, "Space Cadet" appeared, it was originally ignored by the average science fiction book buyer, who judged it to be but the second in the *Galileo* series. It is not, and it is not a kid's book. It is mature, and it is marvelous.

A century and two decades after *Kilroy Was Here,* first of manned spaceships, circled the Moon and returned, a Space Patrol has been established. This is an organization for the maintenance of interplanetary law and order in the year 2075, and the story concerns the trials and tribulations of fledglings from Earth, Venus and Ganymede who would be commissioned in the service of space. The pace they have to follow is fantastic to our earthbound mind of 1950 but very realistic for all that. Heinlein, the master of extrapolation, never indulges in wild fancies, and so the picture he paints is convincing even in its amazing complexity! If your head begins to whirl at the thought of having to master solar languages, be familiar with extraterrestrial biology, history, cultures, psychology, law and institutions, treaties and conventions, cheer up! In addition you must have knowledge of planetary ecologics, system bionomics, interplanetary economics, applications of extraterritorialism, comparative religious customs and law of space—to mention a few. In addition it is obvious you must study atomic physics and learn the art of astrogation.

Before you become an astrogator your body has to be subjected to punishment that would make wrestling a boa-constrictor seem like nesthng in your sweetheart's loving arms. You'll be subjected to everything from spiraling around with no weight

to being bounced about at 7 gravities, till you've hemorrhaged and vomited and/or blacked-out. If you die—though they try not to let you—you are of course washed out of the service.

The Solar Patrol, in the words of one of its officers, is "not a fighting organization; it is the repository of weapons too dangerous to entrust to military men. Its members are trained to use weapons, are under orders, wear a uniform. But their purpose is not to fight, but to prevent fighting." One of their routine chores is inspecting the atomic warockets that ring around the earth from pole to pole, to make sure they haven't strayed too far from their orbit.

Heinlein has long had an itch to get out into deep space himself, and perhaps he has alleviated it by the vicarious thrill of projecting himself into the next century via typewriter, and into that deep space. He does it with such consummate craftsmanship that the reader is projected with him. I dare say even the most jaded of space-story followers (myself an armchair rocketeer since 1926) will experience a new thrill in perusing the pages of "Space Cadet," because of the air of authenticity in them. Here is a handbook of the future, a manual for interplanetary men.

WORLDS OF WONDER by Olaf Stapledon; Fantasy Publishing Co., Inc.; 279 pages; $3

Here is a meal for the mind that feasts on inquiry, is fascinated by controlled imagination's revealing facets. William Olaf Stapledon, M.A., Ph.D., the 62-year-old Philosopher of Fantasy, has told 3 tales beyond the pale of ordinary scientific romances.

"The Flames" is a thought-thriller of a salamander from the sun, a sentient solaroid in search of (as it were) a solmate. The Flame with which we become familiar is an inch-high incandescent gaseous intelligence that establishes telepathic communication with an Englishman known as Cass. After winning the sympathy of Cass, the Flame reveals that it is a representative of the other sun-fires on Earth, who have a favor to ask of mankind. They want Cass to act as their go-between and get people to create a fiery home for them, say several hundred square miles of super-heat on some deserted part of earth's surface so they may leave the furnaces, volcanoes and other hot spots they now inhabit and congregate again as they once did on the sun. (They were exiled on Earth—some of them, others on Mars and Venus—when the parent body gave birth to the planets.) Cass figuratively throws cold water on the Flames' desire when he explains: "To the ordinary person, if he can be persuaded to believe your story at all, the idea of helping such alien creatures will seem quixotic, and moreover dangerous." The Flame argues that its people are peaceful and that a symbiosis with mankind will prove man's salvation, for man is strong in power but weak in wisdom, "a pterodactyl of the spirit," and the Flames can strengthen the spirit. Does humanity accept or reject this amazing offer? I will leave it to the interested reader to find out for himself. Suffice it to say Dr. Stapledon's brilliant imagination here pictures graphically extraterrestrial life, love, liberty and the pursuit of knowledge and happiness.

"Death Into Life," the longest of the 3 unrelated stories, expounds this advanced thinker's views on post mortem survival. The individual ego is absorbed by a multi-spirited entity that seeks to know the dark, tyrant Other (told of in "Star Maker" and "Darkness and the Light")—the creator responsible for all that is, was and will be. In this novella Stapledon displays only briefly the side to his nature most appreciated by his admirers when he stands "at the foothills of eternity" and envisions Man's colonization of five planets, the distant disintegration of Luna into a Saturn-like ring around Terra, and the eventual explosion of the sun which annihilates the minded-life of the solar system. In general this portion of WORLDS OF WONDER is pedestrian paced and repetitious.

"Old Man in New World" regards through critical eyes the changes that have come upon the world in the next quarter century. Whither America, whither Russia, whither Britain? Stapledon states his prognostications. This short work originally appeared under the auspices of P.E.N., an anational association of writers devoted to promoting and maintaining comradeship and intellectual cooperation between writers in all lands, in the interests of literature, freedom of artistic expression, and international goodwill.

Considering that the titles have, until now, only been available on the out-of-print market at an aggregate of something like $11, the 3-in-1 volume is a bargain at $3. There is a striking jacket by Neil Austin.

FORREST J. ACKERMAN

PORTRAIT OF NARCISSUS



Illustration by Thomas Birbiglia, Jr.

IT BEGAN in the days when the ending of the roll film shortage brought back the hordes of snapshot hounds who infest the park on Sunday afternoons. I was walking along with the kid sister, Midge, and her boy friend, Tom Johnson. Every twenty feet we'd see some Brownie fan bent over his black box trying to center a scene that obviously would be a blurred mess. Or someone shooting straight into the sun.

"If all the film wasted on Sunday afternoons were laid end to end it would supply Hollywood for the next ten years," I said.

Midge said, "Rembrandt of the box camera! I'll bet that if you dropped your hundreds of dollars worth of fancy equipment and had nothing but a Brownie you couldn't do any better."

"Listen," I said. "Loan me that box of yours and I'll guarantee to get a salon picture in half an hour—at least an honorable mention."

Midge grinned. "Provided you let me take the Leica for the half hour." She had been trying to get her hands on my f 1.2 for months.

"If you drop it—" I said.

"Maybe I'd better hold it," said Tom. He laughed. He's a right guy and knows all Midge's angles like a brother, and he still loves her.

"Meet us at the bear pens in half an hour," said Midge.

I wandered off looking for a subject to make good my boast. That Rembrandt business irked. Midge still remembered the bragging I'd done at fifteen. Photography had been in my blood since I first dipped my fingers into the hypo pan that was part of the developing outfit I'd got when I was twelve. After that I'd dreamed of nothing but lenses, film speeds, paper textures, and exposures. It was only natural that I'd end up on a newspaper, and I'd been head of the Apex photo office in Dennison for the past five years. But that hadn't been enough. I'd set my goal to be better than Steichen.

It's tragic what the Brownie fiends do to a park. Just a flower or a bent

By RAYMOND F. JONES

Psychiatrists might say that when Narcissus looked into the pool and fell in love with his own image, he was hypnotized; for beauty may well have hypnotic conditioning powers.

twig, or a face caught unawares is all they need for a work of loveliness. But they come out with shots of blurred ghosts in a windstorm.

On this particular Sunday afternoon there was live beauty in the air that was bright with late sunshine. Leaves trembled against the sky with their individual haloes of light.

I was so intent upon the leaves and branches against the sky that I almost missed the girl sitting on a bench under the tree. Only as I turned to find a good point to shoot the tree did I see her.

She was sitting still as a golden image. Her head was down and her eyes were staring absently at her hands in her lap. And that afternoon sun did something to her face that made me want to cry.

I should have had color film. But there was nothing except that old Brownie and its Verichrome.

I approached quietly out of the girl's sight behind some bushes, keeping the camera ready. When I was at just the right distance I stepped out onto the gravelled walk and kneeled to catch the golden light in her hair.

As I glanced down to center her in the view finder, she saw me.

If she had moved with only the normal amount of surprise there would still have been time. But with a single movement of her slim body she leaped from the bench and hurled her handbag at me. It knocked the Brownie from my hands and spilled the shards of the lens and view finders in the gravel.

The impetus of the blow knocked me off balance and set me back on the walk. The fury of her reaction was so startling that I just sat there and looked up at her.

"Lady—take it easy—people have stood in line to be photographed by Hal Forrest. And this is for free."

For an instant she merely stood looking down at me with a terrible emotion on her lovely face. I looked into her intense eyes. They were wide and haunting, but their color was green — truly green like the dark depths of some island jungle, smoldering and hot.

But her fury passed almost instantaneously, and she bent down with a wry smile on her face that made me think I had been mistaken about its intensity.

"I'm terribly sorry," she said. "You startled me so. And I never allow my picture to be taken—*never*."

She laughed a little—quietly and intimately. "I guess a psychiatrist would call it a neurosis," she said.

"I've been this way ever since I was a little girl. My father took my picture when I was pulling faces and it was so horrible that I was afraid I'd grow that way. It's hopeless to try to rationalize me out of it. The sight of a camera terrifies me. And I'm so very sorry — about the camera, I mean. I'll gladly pay you for it."

I looked at the remains of the Brownie. "It's an old family heirloom," I said. "Money cannot replace—"

She burst out laughing. I looked up into her green eyes and laughed with her.

"Tell you what might pay for it, though," I said.

"What?"

"Dinner tonight—?"

Her name was Helen Dowling and we finally found Midge and Tom a couple of hours later. I'd forgotten them until we accidentally ran into them.

Midge saw us coming. She simply put her hands on her hips and watched until we came up.

"Well," she said, tapping her toe on the gravel.

"Hello, Midge," said Helen quietly. "Hal has told me about you."

"Is this the salon print?" said Midge. But she took Helen's hand and they began laughing together as if it were some great joke on me. So I knew then that Helen was all right. Midge can spot a faker a mile away, and what she thought of most of the models and cheesecake babes that I'd brought around in times past was not quite printable.

We had fun that summer, the four of us. Midge thought Helen was wonderful and was glad that I'd found her. I had reached that awful stage when women began to look all alike to me—until Helen. It began to look as if only the first thirty years of my life were to be spent in bachelorhood.

Helen was twenty-eight, and must have had plenty of opportunity for much more than I could offer her, hut I didn't question my good fortune in being the one she had waited for.

Right from that first dinner date we clicked. In the big things and the little things. She liked apple dumplings and red sunsets; they were my favorite food and scenery. She thought a six room house and three children would make a nice family. That was my idea of heaven. And she thought the profession of photography was fine—as long as I didn't take her picture.

I don't remember whether I actually proposed to her or not. It seems that we just took it for granted that we would be married. We started considering the date almost at once.

A week before the ceremony, Mamie Bosen of the society page brought up a touchy subject. She had met Helen. "We'd like to run at least a quarter page photo of her," she said.

"It's no use. She'd break our engagement before she'd have a picture." I explained Helen's phobia to her.

"That's silly!" said Mamie. "She's such a beauty. I'd love to run a picture of her. As for you, I don't see

how you can resist the temptation to photograph her. I'd think you'd be posing her night and day."

I smiled wryly. "I would—if it weren't for that confounded complex of hers."

I brought up the subject to Helen that night as we had dinner in one of our favorite eating places, Dan's. "It's one of the big events in any girl's life," I said. "Her wedding picture in the society page—you don't want to miss that?"

She looked at me solemnly with those deep green eyes of hers. "Hal, I'm not every girl. I'm me. I have my own peculiarities and likes and dislikes. This thing is one of them. I *don't* want it brought up again."

On the word "don't" the green fires in her eyes lit with that deep intensity that sometimes frightened me. But, after all, I told myself, this wasn't an important thing. If she didn't want a wedding picture, why should I worry?

The next day she had completed the assembly of her trousseau and invited some of her friends, including Midge, to a tea. Afterwards, Midge came to talk with me over a pan of developer in my apartment studio.

"Look, Hal," she said with more seriousness than I could remember in her. "I don't want you to think I'm trying to throw monkey wrenches in the gears or be a wet blanket or an old gossip and all that stuff, but Hal—"

"Yes?"

"Helen's going to cost money."

I laughed. "What wife doesn't?"

"No. You don't get what I mean."

"Look, Midge—"

"Hal, listen to me. Honest, I'm not trying to be catty."

"I thought you liked Helen."

"You said that Helen had two thousand dollars that she had planned to be put into a house with you."

"We hadn't made any definite plans about that."

"Well, don't. It's gone on her trousseau."

I looked at Midge in the faint red light of the darkroom. I felt kind of empty at what she said. I had sort of hoped that Helen and I would go together with our savings on a house.

"I do like Helen," said Midge earnestly, "but everyone has faults, and if you don't want too much disillusionment it's a good idea to recognize the faults in the one you love—ahead of time. Helen is so beautiful and charming that it's hard to find any in her. But she has one. It's called vanity."

"Midge!"

"I'm sorry. I just want to help."

"That's a heck of a way to do it."

"I'm trying to save you the shock of discovering it yourself. You can get sore at me instead of Helen. All the girls at the tea liked her, but they couldn't help noticing how she—*preens*. That's the word I want. She's proud of her beauty, and she has a right to be, but she's absorbed in it to an almost—well, neurotic degree. Be mad at me, but be patient with Helen. Try to understand and allow for that vanity. I want you both to be happy."

For a long time after Midge left, I just stood there over the developing

pans, not touching the pile of exposed prints I had lying on the bench.

So others saw it, too. I had felt guilty during the past weeks because I had sensed that she was fond of her own beauty. But damn it, why shouldn't she be? She had a right to be proud of it.

But that wasn't all of it. It was her *preening* that made me uncomfortable. Midge had hit the right word.

There was no mar to the happiness of our wedding and honeymoon. Helen frankly admitted the excessive cost of the trousseau.

"I wanted it as beautiful as possible," she said. "You said some girls' high point is their picture in the society column. That is nothing to me, but this means a great deal. I wanted to have nice things to show you."

I couldn't be angry with her, or even admit that her choice was the result of vanity. Her taste was exquisite, and the loveliness of the things she had bought made it seem almost worth while.

She seemed to grow more lovely each day we spent together in the mountain resort where we went for our honeymoon. Each word of admiration I gave her seemed to bring out that much more of her beauty. Praise nurtured it and increased it like the blossoming of a flower.

To get a house near the city when we got back, we went over our necks in debt. It, too, was a lovely, expensive place chosen with the same taste that Helen exhibited in everything.

By temperament, I was inclined to agree with her that life is short enough and every bit of beauty possible should be crammed into it. As a result, there was little friction and much debt in our household.

We had built into the bathroom a large dressing room with an enormous plate glass mirror which Helen desired. And it was here about a week after we set up housekeeping that the full shock of what Midge had meant hit me.

I was shaving as Helen finished her bath. In the shaving mirror I saw her as she stepped before the huge mirror behind me and dusted herself with powder. The pastel tints of her flesh were like the flowing shades of rose petals. She was Diana standing there. And then suddenly I stopped shaving. I caught a glimpse of those green eyes of hers in the double reflection of the mirrors.

Midge's words came back to me, "—she *preens*—." If any word described Helen then, that was it. But more, there was a kind of gloating in her eyes that was a repulsive thing to see.

"I'm very beautiful, am I not, Hal?" she said simply.

"Of course, darling."

"It's so wonderful, to be beautiful. I feel so sorry for those who are not."

"Well, if the cream and goo and gush of the cosmetic people would do any good every woman would be as beautiful as you are."

"But it doesn't do any good. It's love and admiration that make a woman beautiful, did you know that, Hal? I'd be as homely as an old

witch if you ever stopped loving me."

I turned around to her. That thing that I had seen in her eyes was gone now and I knew that I had only imagined it. "You never need to worry about that, honey. Never."

Of admiration, Helen had plenty. After we got settled in our new house, the boys from the news office dropped in frequently, sometimes for some stag poker, sometimes with their wives for an evening of bridge. I didn't miss the way they looked at Helen, either, nor did she. She thrived on it.

You would have thought there would have been a lot of jealous wives, but Helen was so thoroughly likeable that they seemed to enjoy her presence as much as did the men. They asked her advice on everything from where she got her last wave to how to get a reliable maid.

But love and admiration were far from enough for Helen. She had misquoted on that. The trousseau was only a sample. Expensive perfumes, lingerie and dresses continued to pour in in an ever increasing stream that threatened to break the financial standing of the Forrest household, wobbly as it was.

When I mentioned the bills, Helen looked dismayed. "I'm sorry, but what am I going to do? I can't live without beautiful things."

Well, I loved Helen. I don't think I have to repeat that. But a month after the honeymoon this line was becoming a bit monotonous.

I was thinking that as I opened the rest of the mail that came in with the bills. Among them was a printed invitation to exhibit at a salon. I just about tossed it aside. I wasn't feeling in the mood to strain my brains to produce a salon entry just then.

But before I dropped the thing in the wastebasket I stared at the figures that leaped up at me from the sheet. The salon was offering money prizes. Five thousand dollars first prize.

I whistled aloud. That would be worth exerting myself for. And what it would do to the Forrest bank account!

I looked at Helen. I said, "I want you to pose for me."

The coldness came over her as if someone had poured liquid air into the room. "I thought we had settled that."

I showed her the announcement. "We need that money."

"And you'll win it. But darling, you don't need me. I don't know what kind of composition you have in mind, but there are dozens of models in this town that would make you as beautiful a picture as I would."

"That isn't what I've heard before. We've got to have some money, and this is our chance. With you for a model I can win that prize. I've pampered this neurosis of yours because it was of no importance, but now it is. Go to a psychiatrist, if you like, but I want your help."

"No, Hal." And those eyes of hers were like erupting volcanoes.

There was hell in our house for a week. The green fires in Helen's eyes seethed continually and burned upon

me with an unspoken fury that was beyond all reason. I was scared of this thing. I had read enough popular psychology to know that even in the most normal of us there are hidden fires that can erupt with the smallest stimulus of the correct nature. I tried to persuade her to see a doctor, but it only increased her fury. I tried to reason with her about helping with the salon contest, but I knew I was licked there.

After a week of this, I came home one evening and found her before the bathroom mirror. Her slim body seemed somehow to have lost color and weight, and her face was worried and strained. She turned as I entered, and came into my arms, sobbing.

"Oh, Hal, can't you see what is happening to me? I'm withering like a flower. Don't you remember I told you that it's love and admiration that make a woman beautiful? Since you've taken yours away, I'm dying."

It actually seemed true that something had gone from her this past week. I felt sorry for the row we'd had. I knew then that I could never break down this neurosis—without breaking Helen. It wasn't worth it. We could live with it.

I told her so. She looked up, her eyes brighter and the color flowing back into her flesh. She went back to the mirror and raised her arms above her head. "See what it does, Hal? Your love is to me like sunshine to a flower. Don't ever take it away again."

As she stood there, arms up-raised, poised on tiptoe, a word flashed through my mind. "Narcissus." The name of the Greek boy-god who fell in love with his own image.

The perfect title for a print.

I knew then what my salon entry was going to be. Helen would be my model whether she liked it or not. A dozen times a week, at least, she would pose before that mirror, admiring herself. All I had to do was take the picture.

That involved a major job of house remodeling, and all without Helen's knowledge. I had to place the cameras at a desireable angle and yet keep them hidden.

Closets in the bedroom and a linen closet in the hall next to the bathroom offered the solution. It took me nearly a week to mount cameras and provide what I hoped was suitable camouflage to keep them from being discovered. To provide openings in the walls was the most difficult part. I finally made small metal plates the same color as the walls, which could rotate out of the way of the lens the instant the shutter was snapped, and then return to position. I provided synchronous electric control for all of this, to be operated by a push button near the wash bowl.

As a smokescreen, I made elaborate attempts to get a competition picture in the studio attached to the house. I used half a dozen different models. Helen was never even remotely jealous of any of them and the hours I spent in the studio. She seemed to have a secret pity for those girls.

But they were hopeless for the kind of a print I wanted. I told her so, too, at the end of one day. "We'll

never get a prize print with this bunch of horses. Rembrandt didn't have this trouble," I muttered.

She didn't make any remarks about Rembrandt's wife, who posed for him, and I was glad after I made the crack that she didn't. I was tired of quarrelling.

She patted my cheek. "Of course you'll get a winner. You're a good retoucher. Let's dress and go out to dinner tonight. You look tired."

"Sure," I said. Another opportunity for her to be admired in public I thought to myself.

When I went to the bedroom she was just going into the bathroom, negligee clad. I wondered if this would be my opportunity to try my cameras.

I went in to shave. After a few minutes, Helen emerged from the shower and indulged in the rite of self-admiration that I had grown so accustomed to.

I watched her carefully in the shaving mirror and turned on water to make its rushing noise in the bowl. I punched the button under the edge of the washbowl. There was the faint click of the wall shutters and the cameras, but apparently Helen took no notice of the sound.

That was all. I felt as if I had committed some crime, but I could hardly wait to get to the films. It was useless to expect these to be the final ones, but they would give me an idea of the possibilities.

There was no hope of getting them developed for several hours, however.

That evening was the longest I ever spent in my life. The dinner was bad, the music was dull. The people were incredibly idiotic. And they continued to surround Helen, admiring, feeding her self-adoration.

She finally noticed my distraction. "What's the matter, Hal? Aren't you enjoying yourself?"

"Headache, I guess. Those dames I've been shooting all day give me a pain in several places."

"All right, darling, let's go home. A night's rest is what you need. I'm sorry I didn't realize how tired you were."

I could scarcely conceal my anxiousness to get home. Those waiting films held an unreasonable fascination.

Having posed as being tired, I had to go to bed when we got home, but after an hour of turning and twisting I told Helen I couldn't sleep.

"I'm going to develop some of those shots I took today," I said. "Maybe that will make me sleepy enough to rest."

"All right, darling. I'll read until you get back." She switched on the bed lamp and picked up a book. Lying there with a baby-blue bed jacket about her shoulders, she was a picture of any man's idea of heaven.

I got the films and hurried to the darkroom. I poured developer and hypo into the pans and filled the wash tray. Then I switched off the white light and plunged the sheets of film into the pan.

After a couple of minutes, dark images began to show up, slowly intensifying. I couldn't see much of the detail under the red light, but what I could see was disappointing.

It appeared as if the camera had shifted somehow and blurred the images on both films.

After eight minutes in the developer, I washed and dipped the films into the hypo. After a minute they began to clear, and I turned on the yellow light. The films were useless. The figure of Helen on both was blurred, even though the background seemed clear. I decided to make a wet print for a quick examination so that I could correct the camera angles, which now seemed necessary. But I couldn't figure out that blurring.

It took only a few minutes to make the print. I peered closely as it came out. Then, as that image deepened under the action of the chemical, a chill began to crawl up the length of my spine until it reached the base of my skull and turned into a blast of cold terror.

The picture was not blurred. The fuzziness I had thought I was seeing was—scales.

The picture was not of Helen, but a scaled thing of horror. Its long, taloned claws were thrown behind its head, and the hideous, triple-toed feet were arched as hers had been.

The scales were satiny with moisture. The horror was only roughly human, being about the same height as Helen. But the features were fanged and drooling.

For an instant I wondered if this could be some colossal joke played by Helen. Had she discovered my trick and substituted these things somehow? Dully, my mind worked over the facts, but I think my subconscious leaped at once to the only possible answer.

I had taken a picture of Helen. Therefore, this thing *was* Helen. Now, I understood her fear of a camera. But who or what was she—this thing—?

I seemed to stare at the image for an interminable period. It numbed my mind beyond the power of thought.

Only at the sudden opening of the darkroom door did I whirl about. I think I screamed aloud, but I wasn't sure. For *she* was there. Helen, the scaled horror of the pictures was standing there.

And then I knew for certain.

The eyes.

They were the same. The green eyes with smoky jungle fires burning in their depths.

I must not have been conscious of it for several moments, but the fanged mouth was speaking, guttural, barely intelligible words.

"I heard the click of the cameras," it said, "but didn't realize till now what they were. I'm so terribly sorry—Hal Forrest—"

It advanced.

I retreated. "What are you?" I cried.

"I am what you think I am. The thoughts of your brain clothes the image of your eyes. You saw me as you wanted to see me. Other men see me as *they* want to see me. And the women see only a homelike, passive creature who would never offer them competition.

"This hideous form is as repulsive

to me as it is to you, but I see myself as I am seen. I see myself as you see me. And I chose you because your concept of beauty was greater than that of any man I have ever known.

"Now you see me without illusion—as did the camera. You understand why I could never face an emotionless film."

I backed still farther from the slowly advancing thing. "Where do you come from?" I gasped.

"We belong to Earth as much as you. It is ours, and we have lived with humans for many centuries. Rarely do we have to kill as I shall kill you."

"There are others?"

"Many of us."

It was close now. I could see the cool drops of water on the green scales and smell the fetid breath. The talons reached for me. "I will make it quick if you don't struggle."

A remnant of reason remained within me. I had purposely backed toward a table where long paper shears rested in a drawer. As the talons suddenly raked, I ducked and ripped open the drawer. I grabbed the shears and swung them around with a single motion.

The deadly points came up into the belly of the thing. Greenish ooze flowed over my hand.

There was a moment of surprised, unbearable pain in the dark green eyes. The thing screamed horribly and fell grasping the wound.

I leaped away from the struggling body and ran to the bedroom where I kept a gun. The thing was still kicking when I put a half dozen bullets into it.

Reaction swept over me then. I staggered to the bathroom and was very sick. Leaning over the washbowl, I still remembered the image of Helen poised before the mirror and I cried.

Narcissus, I thought. My beautiful Narcissus.

It had been literally true that she fed on my love and adoration. It had been on illusion that she seemed less lovely when I was angry with her. She mirrored my deepest thoughts of her.

I wondered dully what the police would say about the lizard in my darkroom and how I could explain the disappearance of Helen. I could never tell the truth, of course.

I was too sick to think of possible answers. I called the cops.

Two detectives, Joe Clark and Mac Robinson, came out. I knew them from my days on the police beat.

"There's something in my darkroom—" I showed them the way.

They looked at me. "What's the matter?" said Mac. "You look like you've been dead for a week and they forgot to bury you."

"Take a look in there and you'll be the same way."

I led them in and over by the table where the monster lay with the scissors still in its belly and the bullet holes draining green liquid onto the floor.

They paled, and Mac seemed to sway a little bit. Then they cursed volubly and low.

"Why did you do *that?*" whispered

Joe. "Why in hell did you ever do a thing like that?"

I stared at them. "What would you have done if you saw a thing like that coming at you through the door?"

Joe smiled bleakly. "I could tell you, but you might not like it since she was your wife."

It took me a moment to comprehend. Then I was screaming at them.

The picture was not of Helen, but a scaled thing of horror standing exactly as she was standing.



Illustration by Bill Terry

"That's not Helen! You blind fools, look at the thing. Look at the scales. Look at those fangs. Damn you, damn you—"

They put me in a cell for the night. I forgot all about the pictures until I got there and then I screamed through the night for the guard to send back for the pictures and have someone photograph the corpse. That would show them.

But the house burned up that night. Burned with the pictures and the body that had not yet been removed. Burned before the Coroner got there to take his official police photographs.

Accident?

I'm certain that another of the creatures knew what had happened and burned the evidence that would betray them.

When I learned of the fire, I went berserk. They sent me to the State Hospital finally, instead of to the chair.

It all seems a long time ago now. Some of the pain has worn away. But I don't want to get too well, because they might yet put me on trial for a murder I didn't commit.

They let me do photography. A therapeutic measure, they call it. I took the prize not long ago in a salon showing with a print called "The Maniac." I posed for it myself.

But that's not the reason I still take pictures. They're watching me, guarding me. Someday I'll find another of them. The other day I tried to get one of the nurses to let me take her picture. She smiled and said that she always took a terrible picture. She was a very pretty girl. And I didn't get her picture.

But I will.

I think back to the time when I was a kid on picnics. There was always a girl who said that she never liked having her picture taken because it was always so bad. Maybe you knew one like that.

Perhaps you fell in love with her because she was the prettiest girl in the crowd. Perhaps you married her.

And you've never got that picture of her.

Perhaps you should.

THE END

COMING IN JULY

WAY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE AIR

Ray Bradbury wrote this story for *Harper's!* A *daring* story for readers white and black. Can you *take* it?

ENCHANTED VILLAGE

A. E. van Vogt at his best! A story you will *never* forget!

THE JUSTICE OF MARTIN BRAND

G. H. Irwin gives us the *complete* classic, with the famous *The Vengeance of Martin Brand* included, but completely rewritten!

COLOSSUS II

S. J. Byrne's second in his new trilogy. A trilogy because it is too long to be published in one issue of any magazine, and too good not to publish!



Shipwreck! Not a new tale, but the oldest of all. But this was a spaceship wreck on the most desolate world in the void — and it was four hungry survivors, "one for all —

—AND ALL FOR ONE"

By JEROME BIXBY

THE drift-winds of Mars brought winter suddenly to Alcronah-haut. The small red sun was made smaller and more red by scudding clouds; the surface of the Great Canal sank to a few crusting inches, and the pumps of the water merchants worked overtime to stock their tanks against the coming bleak months.

At the lower end of Boulevard B27, beyond the ugly work-village of Kam and squatting on a sandstone bluff overlooking the skeletal litter of the Alcron freight locks, was the Outer-Worlds Explorers' Club, Chapter XIV, a flat, redrock building, guilty of the randomness of native architecture, and connected to an observatory a little distance away by an unkempt garden pathway of *kanl* and *linla*.

Inside, this night, a young Martian shivered and got up to put another log on the fire. It flamed high, and sent the chilly shadows scooting back into the corners of the room to sway angrily against the dark paneling and glassed-in book-and-curio



"There she is! We won't starve to death anyhow. But we've got to act fast . . . she's freezing in fast! Once that ice locks her in, we're done!"

Illustration by Bill Terry

cases that mounted to the high, timbered ceiling.

Facing his companion, Rof Unain hiked up his tunic to warm his lower midsection. "I suppose," he said, "that Mars' winter is a picnic compared to that of Tethys, Mr. Millikan?"

The fat, gray-haired man closed his hook—one of many he had written—and stretched his outmoded gravboots toward the fire. As the Club's most distinguished member on Mars, and its oldest one besides, Miles Millikan possessed for his use the big chair directly before the fireplace. He shifted in it now and sighed, raised his eyebrows at the young man. "You would like to hear the story, perhaps —" his voice was dry, and a little amused "—while we wait for our steaks?"

"I would indeed!" Rof Unain nodded eagerly. "I've read about it, of course—when I was a kid—but I'd be honored to hear it first hand . . ."

Outside, the whining wind threw heavy *schlussls* of snow against the

leaded windows, and played cold music on the singing sculptures in the garden. The fat man's pale eyes stared into the fire, as if seeking in its leaping redness an image with which to begin his tale. The log fire was an anachronism—and the members of this cluh were, for the most part, anachronisms too. There was an atomic furnace in the cellar, hut the old men preferred to stalk the halls and trophy rooms and shiver their dynamic memories of Pluto and Ganymede and the icy oceans of Neptune, then to retire to the clubroom and warm themselves before carbon flames as they had long ago on those rugged worlds.

Millikan said slowly: "It was two, maybe three hundred miles off-world that the Drive backlashed. God knows why—and maybe Caddo knows why too, wherever he is: he went with the Drive. Four of us—*the* four —were up in Control.

"Greenberg said, 'The hell with old Ringsy—I'll try to world us on Tethys . . .'"

The spaceship came thundering down through the snow, her starboard tubes fused into a seething, white-hot tumor. She flicked a mountain top, sheeting off snow, seeming to ride a moment on a bridge of white fluff that dropped back and down into a sparkling haze.

Another mountain top miraculously avoided; another, miles further, notched deeply into its soft white shoulder.

Then, hissing and screaming like a cat, the ship struck glancingly on a long ice slope, bounced, took the air for another six miles and smashed down again. She began to roll—rather, to cartwheel—end over end, on and on, to vanish over the lip of a ravine. A thud, the tremhling of an avalanche, then a muffled roar as the tanks hlew infernally beneath settling tons of ice and snow. A green flare, and some foul smoke that dissipated quickly in the thin air, and the *I. S. Angel* had made angels of sixty-three men.

The other four—there had been sixty-seven in the crew—lay in the snow—*in* the snow, not on it—each unconscious at the bottom of the little tunnel his flying entrance has created. Each wore an alumalloy bulger, with gadget belt and hotsy that had been turned on before the crash. And each—since the *Angel* had cracked up at 10:31 p.m. shiptime, and after hours of tension and activity preparatoty to the intended landing on Saturn—was carried off into an exhausted slumber at the end of his stunned insensibility.

Tethys' grey nightwind came shrieking across the icy plateau, darkening the racing snow that lifted and fled level before it. Snow-devils danced from pockets and crevices to be whipped and shredded and their flaky atoms sucked into the striding storm. White bours passed; and Millikan, Chief Correlator, was the first to awake. His voice came out hoarsely:

"McNutt? Greenberg? Lacy?—McNutt? Greenberg?—"

At last he remembered to pull his arm up out of the arm of the hulger

and switch on bis talky. He fumbled at the inner control-board. "McNutt? Lacy? Greenberg?—"

He heard breathing sounds—be held his breath and heard them still. "Hey Nutsy—Greenberg—who's alive?"

He heard a groan, and a stifled *Hot damn!*

"Hello there! Lacy? Hello—"

"Millikan! Is that you, chief?"

"Yeah. Looks like we made it—"

The young but competent voice of Lacy, Astrogator, scraped out of his earphones. "Wbere's *Angel?*"

"Don't know—probably screwed herself up against a mountain. Where're you?"

"I hate to say it," came the drawling answer, "but I think it's a grave."

"Me too. We're down in the snow—"

"Uh! How far down?"

"Let's make like moles and see—" Millikan began to squirm around, kicking bis legs and arms until he had enlarged a space that permitted him to turn over. Lying on his stomach, he pointed upward and flashed his wristlight. "Lacy—"

"Yeah, dammit—"

"I'm just a couple feet. I think we hit a hard surface, broke through and went in a little way. There's a blizzard up there—it's corking us in. Better try to climb—"

"And don't make too much fuss doing it," a new voice growled, "or you'll cave in your tunnel. I just did."

Millikan grinned in the darkness of bis helmet. "Hi, Greenboig. Tbat's me, you and Lacy. Now if McNutt only made it we can play Asteroids."

"Asteroids hell! I'll boot you in yours—get me outa here!"

"Lacy, I think Greenberg wants some help—bow mnch does he owe you last counting?"

"Eighty sol-credits, but let it slide. I can spare it, and him too."

Wbile Greenberg gave them a boiling in three languages, all non-terrestrial, Millikan and Lacy went worm-like up their tunnels. Always the feeling that below was nothing but wbite quicksand—maybe hundreds of feet down. Swim! Fly up and out of the brittle cotton—struggle up, slide down—damn the stuff! is this the way up?—or *sideways?*

Poke a hand up, fingers clawed, and Lacy, standing on the surface, grabs and yanks. Out of the snow with a crunch and a stagger—and into a hlinding, white-clotted inferno. They bumped their face-plates together. "Lacy, I kiss you—" "Miles haby, your eyes—that soft, curly—"

"Yeah," said Greenberg sourly into their earphones. "I vote for polygamy. I'm virile too—come and get me!"

They found bim under the crust, several feet away from the entrance of bis tunnel. "I can feel you stamping—" bis voice was oddly tight,"—you're right over me!"

Millikan and Lacy pounded through the hard, milky surface, and dug out the fluff heneath. Metal clicked on metal, and soon Greenberg, Pilot, sat in the snow, his thin face twisted behind his face-plate. "Surprise—" he hissed, "I'm surprised! I got a broken arm and didn't even know it!"

Leaving him nursing and cursing, the other two went to search for McNutt. They found his tunnel several dozen feet away and squatted beside it. Lacy adjusted his proton-huster to light heat and aimed it at the opening: "I'll melt him out—"

Millikan knocked the ray aside. "You'll ice him in, you mean! Wait."

The wind screamed and flooded against them, forcing them to resist it at an angle, pushing great churning walls and spirals of snow across the plateau, whose horizon could not be seen, nor the sky above it, through the thick motion.

Millikan put his talky at full volume and spoke loudly: "McNutt! Hey Nutsy—wake up!"

"Mmm?" A yawn. "That you, chief?"

"Yeah, and Greenberg and Lacy. Give a wiggle." Then, as an aside to Lacy: "That's why he's such a lousy medico—he slept his way through college."

Lacy grinned. "How'd he graduate?"

"The Dean was a female."

This brought a vulgar noise from McNutt, who finally shoved head and shoulders out of the tunnel and was hoisted to his feet. His heavy, pink features were loose and astounded. "You mean we're still alive?"

"This look like Heaven?" came a snarl from Greenberg.

"And since when do spacemen go there?" McNutt gazed about him wide-eyed. "Bejabbers, I think this's the other place, all right!"

The three men rejoined Greenberg and huddled together, warm in their hulgers, only dimly visible to one another through the leaping snow. They rocked on their hips as the sucking wind piled white buttresses against their hunched forms, then stripped them down, whisked them away into the shrouded greyness.

"What happened? We got tossed right out of the damned ship, that's what!" Millikan flashed excellent teeth in a grin. "Remember? I saw you guys go streaking—then I went. What luck! She started to pinwheel, Control split like a herring, and here we are!"

"Where's that?" said McNutt dubiously.

"Yeah; which way do we walk?" Lacy added. "Anybody know?"

They took out their compasses; they switched on their suit lights and thumbed out charts from the clips by the inner control-hoards. High above, for a moment, the whiteness parted and, startlingly, the tiger's eye of Saturn stared down at the four of them. Her rings seemed to writhe in the snow, then she faded and the color was gone.

Millikan studied the Tethys chart, adjusted his all-world compass after the specific vagaries listed there. Finally he said: "We're right smack on 12F, 22 northern. There's an I. P. Station on this clod—look at 2N across .6 southern. That ex is where we head for—"

Lacy whistled softly. "About forty Earth days, if you count ten miles a day!"

"And forty nights," growled McNutt, "and not an Ark in sight—or

even a Flexible Flyer—"

Tiny ground-swells of snow rippled toward them, lapping at their ankles, spraying up to tap on their helmets like rats' claws.

"Check your bulgers," said Millikan. "Anybody got any concentrates?" He searched his own cubbies, found no edibles; and "None here," rasped into his earphones, and "Empty—we didn't have any time—" and, succinctly from McNutt: "Nah, hell!"

Millikan wiped his face-plate inside and out, steam and snow. His lips were tight. "We'd better locate *Angel*."

They walked along the level sweep, tracing the *Angel's* hopping course by the huge, dented-in patches of ice where her searing rump had mashed the surface for a split-second melt. They came to the ravine, and grouped at its edge to stare down. Finger-sized in the distance, pointing rudely at the boiling clouds of whiteness that raged across the abyss, was the dead *Angel*, standing slant-wise in a pool of steam and stained water, her exploded engine room flaring out in jagged petals. The debris of the snow-slide had melted from over her, had made a metal island of her.

Millikan hopped down goatlike from the ice-drowned crags of the rim, skipping across crevices, plowing through sleek, fresh snow slopes, shorn by the avalanche. Tethys' light gravity socked his feet gently into the crusted bottom.

McNutt and Lacy followed more slowly, helping the agonized Greenberg over the rough spots. After a backward glance, Millikan waded out into the pool. He stopped halfway.

"Here's Jack," he said into his talky. A dead face looked up at him from the bottom of the pool, and for some reason he bent to lift up the body, but the body wasn't there. Not even all of the head.

Chest-high in the already clotting water Millikan made his way to the port side and found the airlock sprung open. He pulled himself up and in, and stumbled along the dark, crazily twisted corridor toward the store room.

By the time he came out again Greenberg had fainted and McNutt had joined suits with him and was bending through the belly lock of his bulger to work over the unconscious man. Expertly he set and bound the broken arm and checked Greenberg's oxygen, turning it a little higher. Then he closed the inner lips of the other suit, straightened back into his own and closed its inner lips, separated the bulgers and closed the outer lips of both.

Millikan came crunching up to them. "We don't eat," he said. "Everything's ashes."

Lacy cursed softly, and McNutt drew his thick brows together. "Forty days on water," he growled. "Well, it's been done. At least we have water—the whole damned world's water!"

Millikan checked his filter dial. "Oxy, too. Plenty outside."

"We—" Lacy swallowed "—won't the Smithsonian start up a search for us?"

"Sure. But where on which moon

do you think they'll start, kid?"

They sat there for a while, but Greenberg, looking more than ever like a skull, didn't regain consciousness. Finally Millikan said :"Let's get going. We'll take turns dragging him . . . "

Every hour they changed positions, the leader going back to tbe rear of the single-file to pull Greenberg along and the rest moving up a place. Only the first man kept his eyes open, wary of the sheer, treacberous cutbanks and gaping crevices that appeared wide beneath his probing feet; the others followed blindly, the hand of each on the gadget belt of the man preceeding.

The snowball that was Tethys raced around its ringed parent, and under its sleek white shell four bellies shrank, four faces gaunted. Like the undead they stumbled through the days—like the dead they slept at night. On the third day Greenberg was able to keep his feet, and they made better progress.

And on the eighth day they saw the "white monkeys."

"Up there! *Look—behind that bank!*" Millikan, at the rear, pointed as he shouted, and the others turned in slow motion. Lacy raised his proton-buster and snapped a shot at the scurrying form. It faded into the hlurred whiteness, and he ran, staggering a little, to the spot and found it empty. He came back slowly.

"Everybody carry your gun," said Millikan, and got his out. "We'll eat the next one."

The racing snow gave another red-yellow glimpse of Saturn above them —their daily glimpse, caused by some freak of clashing gravities.

"Golly, Id like to be up there in Pilka right now . . . Ive got a little female there with everything!" McNutt raised his eyes for a second, looked down again as he tripped and nearly fell.

"Dames yet!" said Greenberg acidly. "And with tentacles. What would you do with her in your condition?"

McNutt grinned weakly. "You guys don't really know me."

"I bet. The System birth rate'll sure take a dive if you drop out here, Nutsy. Mass suicides, too—all the dames jumping out of windows huh?"

White turned to gray as night came soaking through the eternal snow, and Lacy's eyes began to hurt. He moved to the rear, giving the lead to McNutt.

"There's another one!" Millikan brought up his gun and fired three fast shots. "Hell! you can't hit 'em —you can hardly see 'em in—*there!*—"

A furry, round-eyed head poked around the edge of a snowdune, jerked back in time to avoid a silent, sweeping quartet of rays. McNutt hunched his huge shoulders in his bulger and licked his lips. "I ate monkey once," he said, "in Sumatra. Wasn't bad. Come on out, you little *sutzes!*—come and get it!" His red eyes searched the surrounding white death.

Lacy sat down abruptly. "How many more days, Miles?"

"The rate we're going, about thirty." Tbe others sat down too, forming a circle, and chipped and scrubbed at their crisply iced faceplates. "How's the arm?"

"Okay." Greenberg was silent for a moment. Then, wearily: "Why in God's name do they build the store room right next to the engine pit?"

Millikan grunted, voicing a shrug. "To save space which saves money—maybe to cut down on the population. It's a Eugenicist plot. You crash, the Drive goes br-r-r-t! and you starve to death."

"I thought McNutt was going to cut down the population."

"Like hell," rumbled McNutt. "I'm not dying out here—"

"None of us are," Millikan broke in. "Come on now—up! We'll rest later. Slow and easy. We'll make it."

Next day they came, like bulgered skeletons, to the edge of the plateau, and saw below a land of tortured, ice-drenched ridges that sheered far down to merge shapelessly into a welter of vein-blue canyons. The snow was less heavy here, and the wind, broken and diverted, less powerful.

"We'd better knock off and sleep here. The climb down—" Millikan wheeled, sent his ray cutting out into the snow. "Damn you!—I almost got that one!"

He squinted through his face-plate, then spoke sharply: "Greenberg, winged or no you're still our best shot. Come on—let's get one of those damned things!"

The two men faded back onto the curtained plateau, and McNutt and Lacy sat in the lee of a snowdune, shifting forward now and then as it threatened to creep over them. They waited, eyes bright and red, for the glad shout in their earphones that would mean food had been gotten. And it came; it filled their helmets and brought them to their feet.

"Lacy—Nutsy! I got one! It walked right into the blast!"

Then they heard Greenberg's voice: "Where? Where, Miles?"

"Over this way—hell, where are you?—oh, I see you. Where's the monkey?—This way. Help me lug it! Man, what a break this—*Greenberg watch out*—that crevice—" They heard a gasp, then a scream from Greenberg—"Mi-iles!—" Then Millikan's dull voice: "He fell. Greenberg fell into a hole. It all caved in on him—"

Minutes later Millikan came back. Lacy and McNutt stood rigid as robots by the snowdune. Silently they cut up the big chunk of skinned white meat, broiled the pieces in their bulgers' cookers. It had a sweet, sickish veal taste.

"I couldn't get to him in time—" Millikan's voice was an unsteady grating sound. "He hung on to the edge of the hole and looked at me. And I couldn't get there in time. He looked at me . . . "

The monkey meat lasted them seven days, during which they followed their compasses and worked their way deep down into the ridge and ravine country. Then came four more foodless days, and their steps slowed and faltered.

They found a stone idol, cruel and ugly, and about it some tumbled ruins of what might once have been a sort of temple; and, crouched in this scant

shelter, they stared up at the tormented snow that lashed horizontally, like a ceiling, across the ice-glassed canyon rim.

Lacy got up suddenly, and said: "Mary, I think it might snow."

He took off his leather jacket, put it in the belly hatch of his bulger and, after closing the inner lips, opened the outer ones and took out the garment. He draped it gently over the idol. Then he turned briskly, strode to a fallen column, rapped on it.

"Some service, please. Ah there, I'd like a box of aspirin—" He paused to listen, pursed his lips. "Two credits? Tch. Well, I guess inflation can't last forever." He picked up some snow and dropped it on the column. "This will pay for it, won't it? Very well then, ask the manager—although I'm sure it'll be all right."

He leaned on the column, whistled a few bars. His eyes traveled the length of the column, and he strained his ears to hear a distant conversation.

The wind shrieked over the top of the canyon.

He straightened and smiled; his eyes came slowly front again. "I was sure it would be. Thanks, no need to wrap it—"

He returned to the idol, put a handfull of snow in its mouth, waited for a while and then pressed his metalled hand to its forehead. "Ah, that's better. Now you've got to rest and relax, dear—cold's nothing to fool with."

He went back to the column, rapped again. "Two tickets please, front balcony center."

Then he sat beside the idol, his eyes fastened raptly on the frozen, featureless ice slope opposite him. The night came across the far plateau and into the canyons, and the deep snows with it; whipping, twisting masses of whiteness that were caught by the jagged walls and flung roaring to the canyon floor to break in foamy explosions and spread like water. From their concealment behind a crumbling altar Millikan and McNutt watched the two mounds become smaller and smaller; and at last, when day came, there was only a snowdune, sparkling and clean and very smooth.

"I suppose we'd better dig him out," said Millikan. He and McNutt got to their feet and went to the spot where Lacy sat heneath the snow. His figure didn't move as they kicked the snow away from about it, and McNutt tapped the silent helmet and it rang like a broken bell. Lacy exploded up and began to fight them.

"Where's Mary?" he shouted, and sent McNutt tumbling back into a drift.

"She's gone on ahead, Lacy!" Millikan held his arms. "She's waiting for us at the I. P. Station—"

Lacy butted him in the chest and ran staggering down the canyon. He vanished, but his voice came strongly into their earphones: "Mary! Mary—you'll catch pneumonia! Don't you want my shirt, dear? Mary—"

McNutt sat in the snow, only his bulgered torso showing. "Let him go. He'll find a rock and call it Mary and die happy."

"Can't do that. Wait here—I'll get him."

McNutt waited. In his earphones he heard Millikan calling, and Lacy's unabated shouts and babblings. Minutes passed. Then he heard a grunt, and there were no more shouts and babblings. "What happened?" he asked.

"Don't know," came Millikan's reply. "I think he fell and husted his talky. Lacy! *Lacy!*—ah, I can't see anything but snow. Lacy! L-l—wait! —there he is! Lacy! Lacy?—*holy hell, it's a monkey!* E-easy now—oh Lord—hah!—hahaha—I got him, Nutsy! I got the white stinker!—"

And then, much later: "Nutsy—I think Lacy's gone. I can't go on looking for him any further or I'll end up lost myself."

Millikan came back, gasping for breath his face yellow and tight. They broiled part of the monkey meat and ate it, packing the rest, as they had before, into their cubbies.

Thirty six days after the death of the *Angel*, her two survivors topped a low rise and saw a level, white-blown plain before them. Millikan clapped his hands. "Last lap!" he cried jubilantly. "Smooth going, now!"

McNutt stood silently, eyes and mouth troubled. Then: "Yeah. You know, I've been thinking, Miles. It's funny that Greenberg didn't yell after he fell in that hole. The gravity here isn't enough to squash a man."

"Probably knocked out."

"He might still be alive then," mused the big man. "Lacy, too. Maybe a searching party could locate them."

Millikan's smile had stiffened over his teeth. "Yeah," he said evenly, "I guess one could."

"And we could guide them, couldn't we?"

"Count me in!"

McNutt said heavily: "Let's get going, chief." He stood aside. "After you."

They walked a little way out onto the plain, silently.

Millikan shouted: "There's a monkey!—"

McNutt whirled convulsively, his gun already out, peering into the thick-hung whiteness. "Where? Where? —I don't see—*damn you, Miles . . .*"

" . . . it was horrible," said old Millikan. "I saw McNutt from sheer weakness go spinning down into that bottomless crevice. God! his screams —" he cut a piece of fat from his steak, putting it carefully on his salad plate. He shook his head and went on: "And so close to the I. P. Station and safety, too. I got there by nightfall of the next day."

Rof Unain sipped his brandy and pouted as he tasted it deep in his throat. The clubroom was shadowed again; the logs in the fireplace had burned down to tired coals. "It's a remarkable story," he said, "and a bitter one—a most sardonic one. Why were McNutt and Lacy and Greenberg spared by a miracle from death in the crash, only to die horribly on the way out?"

Millikan shrugged plump shoulders. "Who knows?—it's very much like

a dream now. Thirty years is a long time."

They stared into the fireplace.

"I think," said Unain, "that my first act as a member of this club will be to propose a toast to those who didn't make it."

"Agreed."

They lifted their glasses and drank.

After a short silence, the young Martian said: "Strange, though, that McNutt should fold like that. I mean, I've seen his photographs—big strapping man—when I was a kid, of course. It was pretty much of a story, that crack-up—I remember—"

"Yes." Millikan stifled a belch. "More than you realize."

"I imagine so. You have to live something like that to—they were never found, were they?"

"No. I led the searching party myself."

"Shame—crying shame." Unain choked a little as he swallowed too much brandy. "It still puzzles me, though—McNutt *was* a big man, wasn't he? I should think he'd have outlasted you all—"

Millikan cut his steak deftly, ousting a strip of gristle. He pondered for a moment, his face reminiscent. "No," he said, "you're wrong there. He wasn't really what you'd call muscular. Big he was, but soft—mostly fat."

PERSONALS

B. L. Hanson, Luverne, N. Dak. wants publications of the Indo-Aryan Publishing Company of Minneapolis and back issues of Rothuggaren . . . Would also like the present address of St. Odin . . . Carl McKenzie, RFD No. 4, Manchester, Teoo. will trade the No. 4 NEW WORLDS (British stf) for the Dec. '49 ASF; will trade SHE, H. Rider Haggard, THE INVISIBLE MAN, H. G. Wells, and DAUGHTER OF FU MANCHU, Sax Rohmer for the first five '49 issues of ASF. Will also trade stf and fantasy books for the following mags; any issue of ASF prior to '49, Cosmic Stories, Science Fiction Quarterly, Stirring Science, Comet, and Captain Future . . . Jerry Burge, 415 Pavillion St. S.E., Atlanta, Ga. will trade '47-'49 issues of stf and fantasy mags for any '38-'40 issues of Wonderworld, Fantastic and Weird comic magazines . . . Wanted: Pen-pals from all parts of the country by Catherine Scott, 2772 Putnam, Detroit 8, Mich. . . . The Fantasy Annual, 120 page review of pro and fan field, $1; Checklist of Fantasy Magazines, 35c; Descriptive List of 1300 Fantasy Books, 10c; the Fancyclopedia, $3; from Weaver Wright, Box 6151, Metropolitan Sta., Los Angeles 55, Calif. . . . For the latest copy of Shangri-La, official organ of LASFS, send 15c to Fredda Hershey, 1305 W. Ingraham, Los Angeles 13, Calif. . . . Wanted, by Forrest J. Ackerman, 236½ N. New Hampshire, Hollywood 4, Calif., Strange Awakening, by Dorothy Quick; 2nd issue WT; copies of Thrill Book mag; stills from scientifilms; addresses of Leslie Stone, G. Peyton Wertenbaker, Sophie Wenzel Ellis, Francis Stevens, and Mrs. Nictzin Dyalhis . . . Paul S. Freemole, Box 547, Midwest, Wyo., has 54 issues of AS beginning with Dec. 1940; FA from May '48 to Nov. '49; AS from April '48 to Dec. '49 for sale . . . Robert P. Hoskins, Lyons Falls, N. Y. would like the "Foundation" series which appeared in ASF and wants to hear from pen-pals . . . An English fan, Walter T. Norcott, 41 St. John's, Worcester, England is offering British stf and fantasy books and mags in return for '40-'43 issues of Operator 5 . . . Walter Coslet, Box 6, Helena, Montana needs the following mags

to complete his collection: Frank Reade Library reprint/rewrite issues; Black Cat; Vol. 2 issues of Thrill Book; Tales of Magic and Mystery; Mind Magic; Myself; Flash Gordon Magazine; Uncanny Tales; Terror Tales; Horror Stories; Strange Tales; 1930-32 ASF; Dr. Death; Miracle; Oriental Stories; Magic Carpet; 1935 Terence X. O'Leary's War Birds; July, Sept. '39, Mar. '40 Unknown; Mystic Magazine; True Mystic Science Stories; 1923-25 WT; some '27-36 WT; Canadian and Australian editions of any stf or fantasy mags. He will buy these, or will trade from a wide variety of duplicate mags, in good condition. Also wants originals, manuscripts, hooks and fanzines . . . Charles Korrol, 698 E. 7th St., Brooklyn 18, N. Y. is looking for teen-age pen-pals . . . The Golden Gate Futurian Society is holding a membership drive. Interested fans in the vicinity of San Francisco get in touch with Rose Davenport, 137 Cherry Ave., South San Francisco, Calif. . . . Robert W. Carr, P. O. Box No. 21, Bridgeport, Conn. offers Triplanetary, Skylark of Valeron, and The Humanoids in exchange for After Worlds Collide and Last Men in London. Would like to correspond with any fan who has lived in England or would be interested in sending stf mags there . . . Mrs. Leo Kuenzli, 309 West Main St., Evansville, Wis. has a collection of Burroughs books and stf mags for sale . . . Peter B. Clarke would like to get in touch with a fan group in Manhattan . . . Wanted: Stories, article, illos, etc. for Transgalactic, a quarterly fanzine; price 15c, one year, 50c. Would also like teen-age pen-pals, but no Shaverites. Write Morton D. Paley, 1455 Townsend Ave., New York 52, N. Y. . . . Robert D. Statton, 1715 2nd Ave., Beaver Falls, Pa. would like to hear from anyone who has Cinvention pictures for sale . . . Ray Isadore, 1907-A So. 14th St., Milwaukee 4, Wis. has out-of-print stf and fantasy books and mags for sale or trade . . . Fanzine SPACESHIP, 5c, available from Robert Silverberg, 769 Montgomery St., Brooklyn 13, N. Y. . . . STF TRADER, 5c a copy, ad rates, 50c full page, 30c half-page, 15c ¼ page. K. M. Carlson, 1028 3rd Ave. S, Moorhead, Minn. . . . Walter Johnson, c/o Silver Birches, Witteridge Road, Lake Ronkonkoma, Long Island, N. Y. would like to know the address of the American Rocket Society . . . Edwin Rothouse wants to hear from anyone who has lost race or prehistoric civilization stories or books for sale or trade. Would also like to hear from someone who will do some printing in exchange for books and magazines . . .

THE BIG SLEEP

By FORREST J. ACKERMAN

ONE prehistoric night a frog, tired no doubt from leaping out from under the feet of multi-ton dinosaurs all day, lay down on his cozy caliche mineral bed. This took place in Artesia, New Mexico in the days when it was probably described, if at all, as something like Ug-Ug Wah.

Approximately 2,000,000 years later, a workman, digging a cellar for a new home, unearthed the same frog. He (the buried batrachian) was still sawing a log. That the greenback had survived in a state of suspended animation for 2000 milleniums was the only conclusion that Chas. Ashton, consulting petroleum geologist, could come to, tho he shook his head in disbelief.

Frère frog had been buried in a mineral bog, seven feet underground. Because there was no crevice or opening, it would have been manifestly impossible for the grownup tadpole to have entered the bed after its formation.

The ludicrous Lazarus lived for two days after his miraculous resurrection.

Then he croaked.



The King sat quietly as the bullets struck his body. "The fourth bullet will be a dud," he predicted. The fourth bullet was a dud.

COLOSSUS

By S. J. BYRNE

STEVE ROCKNER came to a stop on the mountain slope. Without removing his weather worn pack or his rifle, he turned to look back. His brown eyes were bloodshot from the glare of the sun in these high, cloudless wastelands. He surveyed the country behind him. In spite of his well-muscled, six and a half foot frame, he felt like an ant. Sand and sky and vastness. Was he the last man in the world? In his



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He spit out the stone which he had been carrying in his mouth to minimize his thirst, and scooped up a handful of snow. His body ached, his freckled skin was chapped and burned by wind and sun. He knew he had come farther than a normal man could have dreamed of coming,



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yet he also knew that ahead stretched that portion of his journey which could still mean his death, unless he was extremely lucky; for ahead lay Tibet and the Himalayas. How much longer could he go on, fighting wild men and wilder Nature?

Resolutely, he turned once more to the mountain and fell into his mechanical pace. A grin formed across his cracked lips. This was the way he liked it. Making life a gamble. He entertained himself as he walked by looking at the stubs of the fingers of his left hand, all of them cut off at the second joint. That was from gambling, even when he was a kid of twelve. He had bet his friend that the other would not have the nerve to chop them off with an axe. And his friend had bet him that he would not have the nerve to hold his hand on the block That time he had lost. But he still liked to make life a gamble, and he loved a fight. Not that he was belligerent by nature; he just thought that fighting was a rough and ready form of masculine companionship. Since very little could hurt his tank-like exterior, it was all so much good fun. He loved a man who could fight.

"Rocky" had been born ten centuries too late. In his veins flowed the blood of the "men of old." He would have been happier bearing a shield and a sword to the Crusades. He could not adjust himself to the complexities and the regimentation of modern city life. He had run away from Brooklyn to carve adventure out of the world. The trail had led through Singapore, all of Malaya, Thailand, Burma, China. There at the back door of China he had fought and lived and half died, so isolated from civilization that he did not even hear about the Great War of Domination until just a few months ago, and at that the tatters of newspaper he had read were a year old, 1969 to be exact.

A Russian dictator had taken over thirty nations and was trying to form a World State along lines of his own choosing. And the Democratic nations were being pressed back, fighting not only against Russia, but against her Asiatic allies. Well, if he could make it to India, here was one more soldier for the Democratic nations, because he was not coming back out of four years of hell empty handed. He was a rich man. In his pack he carried gold samples and a map showing the location of a huge vein of ore he had found that ran about a kilo a ton. For a kilo a ton it was worth working a gold mine on the Moon.

As he passed beyond a rock shoulder of the mountain, five stocky men jumped on him, to the accompaniment of loud war whoops. They evidently sought to capture him alive, because they did not use knives. Two tackled Rocky's legs, two grabbed his arms, and one swung a light club at him.

However, when the two men crashed against his legs he only staggered. The two that grabbed his arms found themselves getting their heads knocked together. The one with the club, an unpleasant looking chap with one eye and a handlebar mustache,

turned out to be the chief aggressor. As Rocky dropped two of his attackers unconscious into a snow bank and staggered forward with the two men on his legs, the latter jumped nimhly out of range of his haymakers and swatted his knuckles.

"Yeow!" shouted Rocky. "That does it, boys!"

In a lightning swift movement he reached down and grabbed one of the leg-wrestlers by the copious seat of his pants and tore him loose. He then threw him at the cluh man and wiped the other man away from his leg with an ear-swedging blow of his fist.

Ten more of the tribesmen, just coming over a rise of ground fifty feet away, opened their mouths in considerable astonishment to see five of their fellows lying around in the snow like so many cast off garments. They decided to help the man with the cluh, who was getting to his feet in a spitting rage.

Rocky had managed to take off his pack and rifle. Now that he was perfectly footloose and warmed up, he took his battle stand. He had worked this before on these tribesmen and it bad had a peculiar effect. Fights were fun, not a life and death matter. He was not trying to kill anyhody. They might have the intention of killing him at first, hut be had won many of them over hy this battle stand of his. It won their admiration and at times struck up a spark of mutual understanding. Much wiser than using a gun, which would have been futile, offering only a limited respite and making bitter enemies of everybody.

As they came at him they saw to their surprise that he was grinning at them, as though this were just a good-natured "boys will be boys" sort of proposition. He even came toward them, eager for the fight. And when they piled him they learned some tricks ahout Judo, which the New York cops had taught him. Three went sailing over his head before they surrounded him completely. Getting on top of him was no good, because he would not go down. And there was room for just so many.

For one minute it was like a hlurred dog and cat fight. Fists and feet, teeth and nails—and a club. The one eyed scowler with the cluh finally landed a blow on Rocky's skull that crashed him to the ground. Of fifteen natives who had attacked him, there were seven who did not feel so well. In fact, two were taken home horizontally, along with their red headed "guest."

So it was that Rocky arrived in tbe obscure mountain village of Chilchu Tsi, somewhere on the frontier hetween Mongolia and Tibet, in the beginning of 1971.

His head ached. In his mind's eye, as he swam toward consciousness, he saw the one-eyed fellow with the bandlehar mustache, who was snarling at him in rage. Friendly chap. What made him so mad all the time?

A bahhle of strange, excited voices outside the grass-roofed sod hut he was in stirred him to open his eyes. Fully expecting to stare into a sea of

uncouth faces, some covered with eczema and others grinning with mouths that were raw from pyorrhea, as was usual among such people, he was shocked wide awake hy the sight of one of the most heavenly faces he had ever looked upon.

She had hlue green eyes, hig and kind and sad and mysterious, as though a lot of things were there that could not he seen at first glance. Her lips reminded Rocky of a hunch of fresh berries he had seen on a bush one morning when he was a kid. Her complexion was like the pearly side of a seashell, except that she had a small crop of freckles on her nose. And her hair! Neither hlonde nor hrunette nor redhead, the girl had hair that looked like a cataract of molten copper, splashing voluminously ahout her shoulders. She was dressed in some rather nondescript native clothes, ragged hut clean. Nevertheless, she still looked like something that Hollywood would have turned handsprings to get.

She was standing there in the midst of natives who looked like they might have been the elders of the town. The men were husy discussing the profusion of tattoos on Rocky's hig, freckled arms. Rocky was a sucker for tattoo artists and in his wanderings he had made a spectacular collection.

But the girl was not looking at the tattoos. With her hands tucked up her sleeves, Chinese fashion, she bent over him and looked into his eyes with an odd mixture of emotions. He thought he saw hope struggling to the surface between curiosity and—it looked like suspicion.

"Where in the devil did *you* come from, beautiful?" he said, never suspecting that she would understand him.

"From Winona, Minnesota," she said, in plain, Yankee English.

Rocky sat straight up on the rickety cot. "Ye gods! You're American!"

"Of course. Do I look like anything else?"

The town elders crowded around closer now, listening suspiciously just as if they could understand every word. And the street people were threatening to push down the earthen wall as they crowded at the window to see and hear. There at the hack of the room was a scowling, one-eyed face decorated hy a handlehar mustache. He, especially, was watching and listening.

"But what in the name of the heathens," asked Rocky, "are you doing out in this God forsaken spot? I had given up hope of ever seeing another human being, much less a pin-up girl from home! Honest, sometimes the screwiest things happen to a guy!"

"God does not forsake us," she said, strangely, "wherever we are; nor does he forsake any people, no matter how humhle or deeply cast into the wilderness."

Rocky was somewhat unbalanced hy this unexpected comment. "Yeah?" he managed to reply. "Say, what's your name? Mine's Steve Rockner—Rocky, to you."

"Janice Maine," she said. "Glad to know you, Rocky."

"Boy, oh boy!" Rocky exclaimed. "Would Hollywood like *that* for the name of a star! 'As Maine goes, so goes the nation!' Why is it every time I get a good idea I'm always half a million miles from where I can use it?"

Janice laughed, but behind her smiles and good nature a certain urgency was apparent. Her smiles and laughter always died out quickly, Rocky was to learn, like delicate plants in unfriendly soil.

"You might as well know how I got here," she said. "About six months ago they pulled me out of a snowbank, the only survivor from a plane crash. I was with some evacuees from China, trying to get over Tibet into India. The Democratic forces had tried to set up a radar station somewhere out here about a year ago, but warring tribes and the weather had forced them to abandon it. We were looking for the field that was still supposed to be there, in order to make an emergency landing, but we couldn't find it and we crashed. I was pretty well broken up, but these people somehow took a liking to me and now I'm well again.

"What do you mean — *somehow* took a liking to you?" said Rocky. "Hasn't anybody ever told you?"

Again that quick smile that faded too soon. "These people actually execute strangers," she continued rapidly, as though time were limited. "They are extreme isolationists. I haven't time now to tell you the main reason why they took an interest in me, but one small reason is that I can speak a dialect of Chinese that they understand. Now the point I'm coming to is this. They may want to kill you. I'm going to try to talk them out of it. For some time I've been asking them to organize an expedition to take me as far as Dakmar, in Tibet, but they have refused to. One of their main arguments is that their tribe abides by a sort of ancestral treaty with the Tibetans never to enter Tibet beyond a certain limit or tribal frontier. They say they could guide me as far as that frontier, but they know I'd be lost if I tried to go on alone from that point. Therefore, they say it's useless.

"However, now you have come along. They've been watching your approach and they are amazed that you came this far alone. If you agree to go with me they may not think it so impossible for us to get to Dakmar, after all. Of course, the trail goes through the world's wildest mountain country, all snow and ice and bad weather, but—" She stopped for just one moment and Rocky thought he saw a fanatic light come into her eyes. "I've *got* to get through!" she concluded.

"You've just sold me a ticket," said Rocky, cheerfully. "To go with you would be a pleasure. When do we start?"

"Not so fast! I've got to talk them out of slicing your throat first."

"That's nice of you," remarked Rocky. "It's a subject that makes interesting conversation. Incidentally, beautiful, how about dinner with me tonight?"

"*If* you're not mincemeat!" smiled Janice.

A tall old man stepped into the hut and the others made way for him. He was one of those broad-framed, stocky, leathery skinned patriarchs whose count of years has been forgotten. He might have been eighty. His years had been filled with battles, as was evidenced by his scars. One huge wound had even changed the shape of his skull.

The old fellow's pale gray eyes took in Rocky's face, his broad chest and shoulders and a slow smile crept across his face, then faded under the starch of official decorum. He turned and spoke to Janice in Chinese.

"The usual third degree," Janice said to Rocky. "Where are you from, what do you want, where do you think you're going, et cetera?"

Rocky explained himself, detailing everything except the gold mine. They had taken his knapsack and rifle and might find the samples of gold ore and the map, but he doubted that they would signify much to these illiterate bandits at first glance.

While Janice was translating, the one-eyed man with the mustache elbowed his way forward, and the unpleasant scowl on his face did not show promise of doing much good for Rocky's case. He interrupted Janice to jabber and gesticulate vehemently before the village chief.

"This man is one of the chief hunters of the tribe and carries quite a bit of weight with the other men," explained Janice. "He wants to know what Tso Lan Chi the Chief is waiting for. Tribal tradition calls for your blood as a trespasser. Here is where I come in!"

"Don't forget to roll your eyes," advised Rocky, admiringly.

In the end the girl won out. The chief raised his hand sternly for silence. Then he spoke.

"My idea has won him over," reported Janice: "I added a few extra garnishments for good measure."

"Thanks a million," Rocky answered. "But I'd like to break that one-eyed buzzard's neck, just the same."

Janice looked worried. "Now don't you start anything!"

"I won't if that dinner date still goes."

Janice hesitated, looking around her with some apprehension. Finally, she said, "I guess the only place you can get some recognizable food is at my place," she said. "It's the house on the hill with the wooden Buddhas on top of the door. Come at sundown."

As Janice turned to leave, "One Eye" blocked her path. Rocky rose to his feet, his head scraping the interlaced branches of the ceiling. Tso Lan Chi knew what was going on but for reasons of his own he stood to one side and watched no one but Rocky. In his faded eyes an almost forgotten gleam appeared.

Janice stepped to one side, but "One Eye" again blocked her path. She spoke to him, but he laughed at her, and so did his followers. Rocky knew that it was a trap for him.

Janice turned as he approached, but on her face was more anger than fear. "No!" she cried out. "You'll spoil everything!"

"I don't know about that," Rocky

replied, pulling her to one side. "Go over there by the old chief and quietly tell these men to open a path for you."

"But Rocky!"

"Do as I say!"

Janice did as she was told. She went over to Tso Lan Chi and then turned and spoke to the men. "One Eye" and the others looked at her incredulously, and then "One Eye" laughed. For answer, he prepared a big wad of spittle in his mouth, which was intended for Rocky.

But he never got it out. Rocky shot at him with crossed arms and head down. He was a giant battering ram. "One Eye" flattened out with a loud grunt and the men behind him went down on the floor or fell to one side like ten pins. In an instant, Rocky had battered a path through a human wall.

"Get out!" he shouted at Janice, and she ran over the prostrate bodies without a word.

But the party was only beginning. "One Eye" and his men got to their feet and closed in on Rocky with bared knives. Still, Tso Lan Chi said nothing. He only studied Rocky.

"One Eye's" knife flashed in the air, but Rocky's left landed in his solar plexus first. He bent down, and Rocky's right fist descended on his skull like a runaway freight elevator. "One Eye" went down flat on his face and was definitely out of the battle. Rocky went low as he swirled around and plowed through legs, lifting men bodily upward. Watchers outside were astounded to see one fighter come out through the roof. Some of them were running out of the door.

But two scarred veterans barred Rocky's exit with their knives. He had a nasty gash in his back and was bleeding badly, but he was far from down. The bed came next. It squashed one of the knife men and discouraged the other, who ran.

Tso Lan Chi stepped out of the hut and raised his hands for silence. He gave a speech, while the villagers listened in amazement. Then he turned, his old face wreathed in smiles, and took Rocky's arm. Together they marched off to the chief's house to have one of his wives apply medicine to Rocky's wound. . . .

When the sun went down behind the Kunlun Mountains, Rocky walked up the main street of Chilchu Tsi. Straight ahead was the house on the hill with the wooden Buddhas over the door. It was a low, rambling place, the walls of which were of mud and branches whitewashed with lime. He wondered how Janice rated such a big house to herself.

He came to the door with fond anticipations of following the ancient traditions which were always to be expected when "boy meets girl." If she gave him a tumble at all, he was going to catch her while the catching was good.

But when she opened the door he was stopped dead cold before he could start. An icy jolt of electricity seemed to shoot down his spine.

"Janice!" he exclaimed.

"I'm sorry, Rocky," she replied, quietly. "It's better to let you know now."

Janice Maine was a nun. She stood there at the door in a faded habit, rosary and all. Where her abundant, coppery hair should have framed her perfect face there was a black shroud lined with white linen. Somehow, she looked even more beautiful than before, but in a way that made her untouchable to a young man with ardent hopes. Still, there was ever present that urgent mystery burning in her blue-green eyes.

"But—this afternoon you were—" Rocky stammered, completely at a loss for words.

"I know," she replied quickly, "but I have no change of clothing other than what the villagers gave me. All my things were lost with the plane. I only wear my habit now on special occasions, and this is one of them. Won't you come in?"

When Rocky stepped inside, he recognized the place at once as being a sort of Buddhist shrine. Strange, he thought, a Catholic nun in a place like this.

Janice guessed his thought. "Buddhism is not unlike Christianity," she said, "in that both religions accept the existence of one Supreme Creator. I have been drawing many points of similarity for these people between their beliefs and mine, and I have them half converted although it was not my intention—even though I am a missionary. That is the main reason why I have been tolerated here. They respect me as a servant of the Supreme Creator."

Several old women came out of an adjoining room and stood on both sides of the door, their eyes directed at the earthen floor.

"That means that dinner is served," said Janice. . . .

Over a very rustic meal of indefinable soup and goat meat and cheese, the two conversed, and Rocky was given the latest news of the world as far as Janice knew it up to the time of her plane crash.

"If we don't get to India in a hurry," she explained, "even that road of escape may be cut off. The armies of the Asiatic allies dominate China, Burma, Thailand, Malaya, Java, Sumatra, Japan, Korea and Manchuria. The armies of Nicholas the First of Russia dominate fully thirty nations, now known as the New World States. He already has taken Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia in South America and of course is the master of Europe and Africa as well as Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran. His armies and the Asiatics are concentrating on the Democratic forces of the Western Hemisphere. When I left China, everybody was expecting the Grand Attack to drive the Democratic allies completely out of Latin-America, in preparation for taking the United States. Now I don't know what has happened. It may be all over with, for all I know." As she spoke, there shone in her eyes a far away, secret gleam, as though she took more interest in worldly affairs than in those of the spirit. "But I *must* get through!" she said. "I simply *must!*"

"Why?" Rocky asked her, point blank.

She looked at him sharply, her eyes

searching him rather coldly, he thought. Then she looked piously at her bread and cheese. "I must report back to mission headquarters," she said. "Call it a moral obligation, if you will, but I was one of those who were in charge of mission funds for China. In some respects, those funds were protected, but headquarters must know where they are and how they were protected, before something happens to me, as I may be the last survivor who knows. That money represents the charity of the American people and the alleviation of misery for tens of thousands of poor Chinese, not to mention their spiritual enlightenment. That is why I must get through to civilization and contact headquarters."

"But if the New World State forces conquer the United States?" Rocky interrogated. "What good would your message do? I knew before I left the States about this Russian dictator. He's an atheist. How about religion and missionaries under the New World State regime?"

"Have you that little hope for the eventual survival of Democracy?" asked Janice. "At least in the survival of decency and the work of God?" Her words were altruistic and spiritual enough, but their tone possessed an element that caused Rocky to prick up the ears of his instinct. Somewhere, he thought to himself, there was something being hidden.

"I'm trying to get to India," he told her, "to see what I can do to help. I'm willing to fight for what you're talking about."

"Unfortunately," said Janice, dipping her bread in a dish of klabber milk, "you seem to have more fight in you than good judgment."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Your exhibition this afternoon caused the enmity of all of Lo Chan's followers."

"Who's Lo Chan — One Eye?"

"Yes, he *was*. You killed him. Do you know what that means?"

"Look! I came along minding my own business," said Rocky. "This One Eye did not want to make friends. He practically manhandled you, prepared to spit in my face, and keep us both from getting out of here alive. He also pulled a knife on me, and his followers did the same. I did not intend to kill him even though he was definitely out for my blood. What did you want me to do? — turn the other cheek?"

"Well, all I can say is that we have been given orders to be ready to leave at dawn."

"Good!" Rocky exclaimed. "The sooner the better!"

"But it is Lo Chan's men who have insisted on our going, and it is they who insist upon guiding us. Where we are going is a No Man's Land of mountains and snow, in altitudes where anything can happen. A person can faint from altitude sickness and fall off a glacier into a crevasse. It would be very easy for them to come back and say such a thing had happened, or say nothing at all. Do you see what I mean?"

"In other words," grinned Rocky, tearing apart a small, flat, leathery loaf of bread with his granite-like paws, "they want to get rid of us as

soon as possible. Probably when they come back—" Here the grin faded, to be replaced by an angry frown. "They'll slit old Tso Lan Chi's throat and start a new regime."

"Exactly," said Janice. "And Tso Lan Chi knows it. He knows his time is up, but somehow he's taking it very calmly. I cannot explain his strange attraction to you."

"Gee, thanks!"

"I mean—" Here Janice actually blushed, and as though in self-defense she clutched her rosary. "Well, you *know* what I mean!"

"All I know," said Rocky, his brows swedging together, "is that I'm out for whatever remains of Right and Good in the world. My own personal gospel is the Square Deal. I'll cross the deepest flood and the highest mountain and give my last drop of blood for that. I guess I'm of a peculiar breed, because there are very few suckers left like that. Idealism and altruism are adolescent playthings. Grownups are 'practical.' Ha! *What* is practical?—Just a label for submission and ignorance! Not me! I'll live, fight or die for a good cause, and as a matter of fact I'm still in search of something really worth while to fight for. I was thinking I might find that cause in India."

Janice's blue green eyes seemed to show a hidden, inner fire, for a moment, as she gazed very deeply into Rocky's eyes. Then she looked at her beads. "Maybe—" she started to say.

"Maybe what?" said Rocky, deliberately impaling her with a stare.

She looked up and straight into his eyes again. "Maybe I can lead you to such a cause," she said.

One of the old women attendants entered to announce none other than Tso Lan Chi. The old man was dressed in his best furs and beads of state. There was a look of conviction in his eyes that what he was about to do would be his last great gesture in life.

Janice gestured for the chief to sit at the head of the table and be graciously accepted, all the while looking at Rocky. After a minute or so of sitting there, he began to speak, very slowly.

"He wants me to translate for him as he speaks," said Janice, who was somewhat excited by the old man's manner. She watched him intently while she translated. "'I am an old and ignorant man, according to Occidental concepts. Still, I have learned many things which cannot be learned from books. And one of those things is how to judge a man. There are, even in one single race, as many species of men as there are insects, but they can all be divided into two major groups. These are the Blind and the Seeing. I do not mean physical sight, or even spiritual sight. I mean that there are people who can see straight through men's false pretensions and claims and recognize true values. You are such a man, and so am I. You are of the Ancient Blood—from the times when *giants were in the Earth.*'" Janice was startled by her own translation. She looked at Rocky and then at Tso Lan Chi, her eyes beginning to blaze

again with that mystery that she harbored. "'You will live, fight or die for your beliefs. It is what Occidentals call knighthood—chivalry. We call it the Ancient Blood.

"'For this reason I have done all in my power to spare you. I am very old now, and I have lived many years. But I lived for the things you live for. I may die, yes, but in you the Ancient Blood continues, as if you were my own son. You are in danger. I must warn you that Lo Chan's men are planning to kill you, out on the trail. There is only one thing I can give you that may help.'"

Here Tso Lan Chi fumbled in a leathern pouch at his belt, his old hands shaking with excitement and emotion. He drew forth a fine golden chain, a necklace. But it was the thing which the necklace supported that caused Janice to catch her hreath and stare. Tso Lan Chi held it up dramatically.

"The Sword of Agarthi!" exclaimed Janice, rising to her feet.

It was a miniature replica of a long, graceful sword such as a knight of old might have worn to go in search of the Holy Grail. Made of solid red gold, it was decorated exquisitely with an almost microscopic arahesque of silver threads and a single hlue sapphire that looked almost like a small eye, surveying the world as though endowed with a wisdom of its own. This single jewel was mounted where the cross of the handle met the hlade, giving the whole piece the appearance of a cross as well as that of a sword.

When Janice pronounced the word, "Agarthi," old Tso Lan Chi's eyes opened up wide and he looked at her for the first time with an expression of deep suspicion, almost anger. For a moment his withered hand clutched the sword as one might protect a holy article from the sight of blasphemy.

But as suddenly as she had jumped up she sat down and became silent, her face red, and with her eyes still devouring the thing that Tso Lan Chi held in his hands.

"He wants you to take it," she said to Rocky, almost breathlessly.

"Well, what in the devil is it?" said Rocky. "And what's all the excitement about?"

"I — I mistook it for something else," she said, hastily. "Take it!"

Rocky reached out his hand and received the beautiful necklace while smiling confusedly at old Tso Lan Chi. "Thanks very much," he said.

"He wants you to put it on. You wanted something to fight for. *Maybe* that's it."

"You said *maybe* in a funny way. What do you mean?"

"Never mind! Put it on!"

Rocky put the thing around his neck and the sword disappeared underneath his shirt, just below a gorgeously colored tattoo of a golden Cornucopia. Tso Lan Chi rose to his feet and put his hand on Rocky's shoulder.

"'There is much evil in this world,'" Janice translated for him as he spoke. "'Sometimes we fail to recognize it because it goes in disguise. Perhaps the Sword of Agarthi —'" he looked at Janice and she

turned red again, even as she translated, " '—will help you to discern evil when you see it. It is the greatest gift I can give you, and as long as you remain as you are you will continue to deserve the privilege of wearing it.' "

Rocky got to his feet and shook hands with Tso Lan Chi. He did not smile, nor did the other. He only looked into the old man's eyes and more was expressed that way between them than through the medium of the spoken word.

Tso Lan Chi turned to Janice. He spoke to her briefly and then left the room.

"He says he will have brought to your hut everything you will need for the trip tomorrow," said Janice.

"What about you?"

"I have accumulated everything I need since several months ago. I had to make myself ready to take advantage of any opportunity that came along. Now that opportunity has arrived, more or less."

"What do you mean — more or less?"

"Lo Chan's men. They're experienced mountain people. They are out to kill us. You know that."

"Oh yes, I had forgotten," said Rocky, casually. "But don't get so discouraged. How do you know that I don't have a few tricks of my own up my sleeve?"

Surprisingly for a nun, Janice said, " 'His strength was as the strength of ten, because his heart was pure'—tra la, tra la, tra la!"

Rocky sat down with a *thud* and looked at her with a determined scowl on his freckled face. "Say, what's the score with you, Janice?" he demanded. "First I find you to be a very understanding and attractive young woman in whom I'm frank enough to say I suddenly began to take a very personal interest. Then I find you are unapproachable because you are a nun. But now you act like you know far too much about the world to be a cloistered bride of Christ!"

Janice stood up, indignantly, clutching her rosary. "Young man," she said, austerely, "you are unacquainted with the training and the work of missionaries. We necessarily come in contact a great deal with the world, in fact more so than you might at first imagine. I don't like what you have just said, and that is unfortunate, because otherwise our trip together might have been more pleasant, whatever its dangers might be. Good night!"

Rocky wanted to ask her about the Sword of Agarthi, but he had never been very enthusiastic about talking with women when they were angry. Thanking her for her hospitality he left. . . .

Three of Lo Chan's men led the way upward toward the seventeen thousand foot divide. Then came Rocky, towering grotesquely above them in his furs and under his hugely increased pack like some extra-terrestrial species of giant man. After him came Janice, now no longer in the habit of a nun, but wrapped in a practical bundle of fur-lined mountain clothes which were crude and coarsely stitched but formed an effec-

tual shield against frozen death. Following her came seven more of Lo Chan's men. They and Rocky carried crude, hand-made ice picks. All members of the silent column were tied together with rope.

Nobody conversed. There was not enough oxygen in the air for idle conversation. There was a consciousness among them of the slow, unfaltering pace they must keep. Not too fast, or the dreaded, nauseating blackness would creep up on their senses. Not too slow, or the subtle sleepiness induced by the deadly cold would envelope them. Breathe through the ice-encrusted fur lining around your mouth; long, steady breaths. Forget about such a small thing as a frozen nose. No time to stop, impossible now to remove ice-packed mittens. Just keep going.

They were all wearing leather straps over their eyes. In the leather, narrow slits had been cut, over which cat-gut had been stretched and sewn. It was bluish but transparent—saved the eyes from snow blindness and sub-zero wind and sleet.

Clever, these Mongolians, thought Rocky. In fact, this particular group was too clever. Why were there seven men behind him and Janice and only three ahead? That arrangement, he figured, was not accidental, and he meant to watch out for trouble from behind. But every time he managed to look back he could see nothing but the leather straps across their dark faces. They followed Janice without unusual sound or action.

But Rocky knew what they were waiting for. It was a certain place somewhere ahead. Some difficult spot, where they could play tricks with the climbing rope and lose their charges down a crevasse. He felt it was near now, because he sensed just the slightest rise in tension among the men as they climbed higher toward the pass at the top of this gigantic ice cleft. He felt sure that when they topped the pass they would see the place where the unequal duel would be fought—himself against Lo Chan's men.

As they climbed nearer to seventeen thousand feet, Rocky felt the line behind him grow tighter. Somebody was lagging. When he turned to look he knew it was Janice. Her head hung down, and she bent over as she walked. She had lost the pace. That was no good; too much struggle for her that way. She had been very unsociable since leaving Chilchu Tsi, due to their heated conversation in the Buddhist shrine. Still, she was a woman.

Rocky pulled back on the men ahead and they stopped to stare at him through their leathern slits. Rocky waited until Janice bumped into him. She lifted her face and looked at him. It was flushed, as though she had a fever. But she refused the support of his arms, stubbornly pushing his hands away from her.

"If you were not — so snooty," Rocky gasped, "you'd be grown up—and let me—give you—massage."

She shook her head and signalled for him to continue walking. Then she fell and he caught her, dropping to one knee as he did so. She was

plenty blacked out all right, he thought. For just one moment he had her in his arms, her face within a foot of his own, her lips turned up to his, just slightly parted. He still thought she was the prettiest girl he had ever seen.

No place for necking, he scolded himself. He placed her on the ground and started to massage her legs vigorously while the Mongolians merely stood by and watched. He took a lot of energy out of himself to transfer it to her own limbs and stir up the blood circulation. When he got to her head, she came to. She looked at him out of the eye slits in the leather strap and did not seem to want to move. Morpheus' deadly cousin Cold was tempting her to rest forever.

"Now get up!" Rocky said, his breath making a fog between them. "We'll strike—slower pace. After we get—over pass—easier going."

As he helped her to her feet he noticed the men behind her. He caught them making signs to each other and pointing ahead at the top of the pass. On their faces were triumphant smiles.

"And keep—head up," he said. "Keep — eyes — on me. Trouble — watch!"

She said something so faintly that he did not figure it out until they got under way again. Then he realized that what she had said was, "Scared—Galahad?"

He cursed, and anger warmed his blood. He watched the men ahead, at the same time keeping an iron grip on the rope and as firm a footing as possible on the icy trail they were making. Above him, storm clouds drifted into view and snow began to fall.

Just then the leadman topped the pass. He stood there looking at something in high elation, and everybody stopped. He cried out something which echoed meaninglessly in the ravine until Rocky heard the man ahead of him pass the word back.

"Kwung Djawa!"

Rocky took advantage of slack in the rope to get closer to Janice.

"What's — *Kwung Djawa?*" he asked.

"You will see," he heard her reply faintly. "We are on—right road."

Rocky wondered how she could know whether this was the right road or not, hut he could not spare the wind to ask her. Instead, he decided to see for himself what *Kwung Djawa* was.

He did. When he topped the pass, he came to a momentary standstill until Janice came up and stood beside him. There, indeed, was *Kwung Djawa.*

It was the mightiest glacier he had ever imagined. Only a half mile below them, it was about ten miles across and seemed to flow imperceptihly hut with a titanic irresistibility. In the crisp stillness Rocky could hear the voice of the glacier, like tenpins being played by titans in subterranean chambers.

Janice tapped him on the shoulder and pointed beyond the *Kwung Djawa.* Through the light snowfall he saw a plateau on the opposite side of the glacier. On the plateau were several lumps of snow and ice which

might at one time have been buildings. Something black stood there against the whiteness, like a metal tower of some sort.

"Radar—station," Janice said.

Rocky pointed to the sky and with a broad gesture indicated the gathering snowstorm. Then he pointed to the glacier below.

"Tough stuff," he said. "Better camp—wait—good weather."

But the little men were tugging on his line. They insisted on continuing the march downward toward *Kwung Djawa*. And so he shrugged and started to walk onward once more. If they ever reached that radar station, he reflected, he would thenceforth always expect a miracle each day before breakfast. And even if they did get there—then what? That abandoned equipment would not be in working condition, that is, the radio transmitter, if it was still there. And besides, he would not know how to work it. As for Janice, what would a nun know about it? Still, these landmarks appeared to mean that they were on the trail toward Dakmar. That was *something*.

By the time they had descended to the glacier's edge the snow was falling so thickly that they walked as though in semi-twilight. Visibility rapidly shortened until they could not see twenty feet ahead, due to the very close proximity of the snow clouds above them. But they could still hear plainly the deep, cavernous gnashing of titanic teeth in the depths of *Kwung Djawa*, the monster whose side they had reached. A nasty thought persisted in Rocky's mind. *Kwung Djawa* was hungry!

Already, the three guides ahead were standing on the icy "scales of the dragon," tugging on his line so that he would follow. He felt Janice behind him. He knew he was anything but a coward, yet everything in his being told him that the thing was suicidal. He loved a fight, yes, but he did not like being overly extravagant with his chances. After all, why be such a fool as to step up and tweak the very nose of Fate?

He turned to Janice, "It's suicide," he said. "What do you say?"

"I say use your Sword of Agarthi—Sir Galahad," came her sarcastic reply. "It will protect you—from all evil!"

Rocky looked aghast at what was visible of the girl's face, and he saw her sneering at him. *That did it!* He turned without a word and followed his "guides." He wished he could remove his thick mittens to get a good grip on the rope, but that would be foolhardy because his hand would freeze in a few minutes. No one knew it, but he was at a disadvantage with rope, because only his right hand could grasp it firmly. The stubs of fingers on his left hand could not assure him much of a grip when he had mittens on.

While walking and trying to peer through the blizzard at the man ahead of him, he shifted his rifle around to where he could grab it in a hurry. Anything could happen now, any minute. The glacier's surface was corrugated and furrowed with hundreds of crevices, varying between six inches and three feet in

width. But wait till they found a crevasse!

The funereal march proceeded in silence, but the darkness and the rising howl of wind and sting of sleet and snow, accompanied by the sounds of the world being ground to pieces beneath the glacier, contributed to an almost unbearable tension. Rocky had mountain sickness, the thing that is called *saroche* among the Andes of South America. His eyes felt as though a dozen fish-hooks had been dug into them, supporting a leaden weight by means of string, in front of him. Every time he leaned forward or moved quickly, the imaginary weight seemed to move, pulling on the fish-hooks in his eyes. He knew Janice must be suffering, too, but she continued laboriously behind him without a murmur.

Suddenly, he saw his three leadmen take shape out of the blizzard's darkness ahead. They stood there waiting for him and their companions behind. And they looked significantly in front of them.

There it was — a crevasse that dropped malignantly into nothingness at their feet. The sound of the giant's ten pin game echoed hollowly up its walls, and the wind howled through it in mournful accompaniment. A mouth, this was, hungry and waiting —*but for whom?*

He felt Janice behind him, and her hand clutched his arm. So *now* she was scared! A bit too late for that. This was no place to camp. They had to go on.

The little, frozen-faced gnomes ahead began to walk gingerly along the edge of the crevasse, looking for a likely place to cross. After some time, they found it. Visibility now was approximately twenty feet. Ahead in the snow-blurred dimness loomed the other side of the crevasse, and on its edge dark splotches indicated boulders that the glacier had scraped up somewhere, possibly in an avalanche. One huge boulder was eighteen or twenty feet high, barely within range of their vision, like something seen dimly on the bottom of the sea.

As though from long practice, the three leadmen made preparations for getting across. The front man had an extra coil of rope and a sort of harpoon. He swung this around his head several times and let it fly across the abyss. Everybody watched it silently.

It landed among the rocks and planted itself firmly in the ice with a loud "clack!" The head man pulled on the rope testily, then harder. It held. Back about six feet from the edge of the crevasse the second man sank a long stake into the ice, pounding slowly and carefully with a small boulder. Too hard a blow could crack the ice and send them all into the pit. Gooseflesh rose all over on Rocky's body.

He foresaw what was to come. One by one, they were supposed to cross that uncertain bridge of rope. But what would happen when *he* came to cross? A quick knife slash on the rope could end it all for him. Then they could do what they wanted with Janice. This situation was precisely

what Lo Chan's men had been waiting for. Rocky was the only one who carried a gun (so he thought), and he was big enough to manhandle quite a few of them. But when they had him out over the crevasse dangling from a rope—then what? A nice plucked pigeon, he!

Like a chess player trying to build up the strategy of six moves ahead, Rocky thought quickly and hard. The first man went out on the rope, hand over hand, but tied to it and an extra safety line by an extra loop, while his companions waited with the main lifeline in their hands, in case he should fall.

But he made it, and it was perhaps lucky for him that he made it quickly, because in the instant that he reached the other side the two behind slipped and would have gone over if Rocky had not held firm behind them. He took careful mental note of that fact. The ice here was very slippery. He also made a close observation of how the boulders were arranged on the other side.

The second man started over.

Janice pressed close to Rocky. "What are you going to do?" she asked, tensely.

"Stick close," said Rocky, "and do anything I say, instantly. Our lives depend on it."

Janice said nothing, but she stayed close beside him. The third man went over, while Rocky and Janice and the others with them gripped the lifeline in readiness for any slips.

Now it was Rocky's turn . . . He looked into the black depths of the crevasse, with the wind and his pulse yelling in his ears. He looked at Janice and saw that her face was as colorless as the snow. He looked at the men behind her and saw that they looked like frozen apes. But when he looked at the straps across their eyes he sensed a concentrated, hateful, expectant scrutiny. This was the moment of their triumph. They all seemed to be thinking: *Well? We're waiting, chump!*

Suddenly, Rocky pushed Janice way back from the edge of the crevasse and slapped his rifle into her mittens. He got a handkerchief from somewhere inside his clothing. He took the rifle back for a moment and blew on the trigger with his mouth to warm it up so flesh would not stick to its frozen surface. Then he removed Janice's right mitten, gave her the gun again, and tied her mitten over her hand with the handkerchief. This gave her hand some protection from the freezing wind.

"Shoot the first devil who makes a false move!" he told her. "And when I'm over, sling the rifle to me!"

"Go quickly then," she said, taking a firm stand with the rifle. "And Rocky—" He looked back at her. "I'm sorry for—everything."

But Rocky did not feel sentimental just then, not with that crevasse yawning for him and those ten pirates waiting for him to climb into their trap. They may have been surprised by his strategy with the rifle, but they did not show it. They only waited.

He went as quickly as he could. In an instant he was dangling over nothingness and going along the slippery rope like a man desperately

running a race on his hands. He saw out of the corner of his eye that the men were crowding close at both edges of the crevasse, hut he saw Janice step up, too. She was gesturing at them with the rifle. And he was thinking ahout those stuhhy fingers of his damned left hand. Once, his left hand slipped off the rope and he had the four fingers of his right hand between him and Death. But he grahbed again with his left hand and struggled onward.

Then he was across, his hands gripping rocks at the edge. Nobody would help him up, and he could not pull himself up in those heavy clothes and with his pack. He managed to twist his head enough to get a look at Janice. She had raised her gun and was taking aim at one of the men who should have heen helping him. So finally Rocky was given a helping hand, hy several of the men. They were grunting and arguing much together.

But Rocky got up and onto his feet. He could have kissed the rocks and ice beneath him, hut there was no time to consider such things. First he checked up immediately on the state of belligerency of the three leadmen who were with him on this side of the crevasse. They were about six feet from him, engaged in a heated discussion. So he took advantage of the situation by signalling to Janice for the gun.

She swung the barrel around her head once and threw it as well as she could, while the seven men on her side watched its gyrating course. It came to Rocky's feet with a clatter. He reached for it, had it in his frozen glove, then it slipped out.

The rifle fell silently into the ahyss.

Rocky and Janice just stood there and looked at each other. And the ten Mongolians looked also. These latter drew close to each other and close to their foreign charges. The crevasse still bellowed its deadly song and the hlizzard pressed upon them a little harder.

Rocky wanted very much to get Janice across. As he looked at her rather forlorn figure there on the other side, he forgot ahout their differences of the past few days. She was not only a woman, hut one that appealed to him despite the cloth to which she was dedicated. He could not help it. In that particular moment there was nothing that he wanted more in life than to have her safely across the crevasse.

He turned and looked at the three leadmen. They were closer to him than when he had last looked, and they were very silent. But when he turned, they hacked up. He walked toward them threateningly and they retreated some more. He made very clear signs to them to remain where they were or he would flatten their skulls. Then he looked across at Janice again.

The men on that side were preparing her for the crossing. The extra loop of rope was already around her and tied to the main lifeline. They lowered her down into the crevasse and she gripped the lifeline and the auxiliary safety line in desperate haste. Just once, her face turned to-

ward Rocky. Then she started across.

Rocky could not help being fascinated by the rapidity of human thought. In mere seconds of time he was able to consider a lot of things. The ice was slippery under the feet of the seven men on the other side. On his own side he knelt among rocks that were solidly anchored in the ice The main lifeline across the crevasse was tied to him and the others. A second, safety line was stretched across between two anchor stakes. Janice's loop went over both these lines.

When Janice reached the middle of the gap, Rocky looked once behind him—and forgot to breathe. He saw one of the Mongolians run back from the anchor stake. He had cut the safety line! Now fully half of Janice's weight was transferred abruptly to the line that went around Rocky's waist and he braced himself. He looked behind him again and saw the three men disappearing in the blizzard, around behind the giant boulder.

"Janice!" he shouted above the howl of wind, "Hurry!"

She did, and when he could reach her he plucked her as though out of the air and practically threw her down beside him. By perhaps three seconds he gained one slim chance to live. For they had cut his main lifeline! The three men behind the boulder had cut the line between him and them—which could mean only one thing. The seven men across the gap would now pull him and Janice into the crevasse. And the other three on this side would soon come back and push, as soon as they had assured themselves of a new anchorage for their own line.

Then the big pull came, and Rocky would have gone over except for the rocks in front of him, against which he now braced himself. Seven against one, and soon three more would be pushing on his back. He sweated in spite of the cold as the tugs on his waist threatened to break his back.

"Tell me when they come!" he shouted to Janice, referring to the three Mongolians behind the rock.

Janice automatically got behind him and helped him pull back, but vigorous as it was her woman's strength was a poor contribution in the face of that deadly pull from across the crevasse. Rocky knew he could not hold out against them, unless— He had thought of one trick, a very slim chance. If it did not work, he and Janice would be hurtling downward into oblivion within the next sixty seconds.

At the height of the hardest tug, he suddenly fell forward and thrust his right shoulder against a big boulder. The forward lunge produced about six feet of slack, and the first three Mongolians across from him fell precisely on their posteriors. Instantly, Rocky called upon every ounce of strength in his body and pulled back on the lifeline. He got to his feet and leaned back on the line at a forty-five degree angle, feet braced in the rocks.

The three seated men began to slide while their companions shouted in alarm, grabbing at the line and pulling back. They had the end of

their line tied to a safety stake, but now they were not sure that it would hold in this emergency. In their excitement, more slipping occurred, and another fell down, pulling a fifth one with him. Now men numbers one and two were dangling and screaming in the throat of the abyss and Rocky's arm and shoulder muscles were getting near the point of tearing loose. He used his back and legs to snap the dangling men up and let them fall, which served to rip their safety stake out of the ice and drag two more men over the brink.

"Help, Janice!" he panted. "Get—rock! Cut rope, or we'll go with them!"

"Here come the others from this side!" he heard Janice cry out.

Rocky did not have time to look. He could not sling his line around a boulder for support because there also was no time, or slack, for that. The four men in the crevasse were pulling the others after them, slowly but surely. He knew definitely that he could not possibly serve as an anchor for them all. The last three men struggled frantically for their knives, but there was no time to cut the line and save themselves. They skidded helplessly toward the abyss. Rocky heard the yelling of the three men behind him and his eyes were filled with the vision of merciless Death, its fingers already closing around him and Janice.

His right arm, about which the life line was wrapped, shot out in front of him. He thought it was leaving his body and heat and blackness surged into his head. Then something went "CRACK!"

It could have been the rope that snapped, or his arm, or a pistol fired at one of the men behind him. In a swirling nebula of confused sensations he heard inhuman, bloodcurdling screams fading into a bottomless pit. Into his mind came recollection of a fairy tale about the valiant tailor. "Seven at one blow!" he said aloud to himself. "Seven at one blow!"

Then he regained full consciousness to learn at once that the loud, cracking sound he had heard had consisted of the breaking of the life-line, the pulling of his arm out of its socket, *and* a pistol shot. For Janice stood there with her back to him, a small pistol clutched in a hand that was already blue with cold. A man lay dead at his feet, and the other two were running. She shot a second man. Then she turned and motioned Rocky to his feet, not knowing about his arm. They ran through the blizzard, trying to find that last man. Rocky was glad, in spite of his pain. This was for Tso Lan Chi! None of these cutthroats would return to Chilchu Tsi if he or Janice could help it! But it was all Janice's show, really. Rocky could only stagger after her in a blind torment of pain and exhaustion. His eyes and his head were grenades ready to explode. His throat was a raw, open cut, it seemed, where the cold air swept into his lungs.

A man out there in the dimness was yelling. Madness had fallen upon him, caused by terror at the sight of his companions screaming away

into nothingness, and by the knowledge that he was alone out here against these two.

Soon they saw him come running at them with a knife, his teeth flashing spittle. Completely berserk and howling like a mad animal, he came at Janice even in spite of three shots she pumped into him.

Rocky tried to step forward, but instead he fell weakly to his knees—just as Janice's gun jammed.

"Look out!" Rocky shouted, weakly. He tried to get to his feet. But the ice began to shake, making menacing, cracking sounds, and he lost his balance.

The man with the knife came in at Janice, slashing. She ducked with a strangely expert technique and came up holding his knife hand at arm's length above her head. But he kicked at her and came in trying to use his teeth.

Then the ice gaped open. Janice teetered on the brink of the four foot gap, while the maniac slipped down into it. Before he got all the way in, the ice closed again, just leaving his head and shoulders out.

Janice screamed and turned away her face and Rocky knew that that terrible vision of a man's face turning purple and bursting at the neck was something that would follow them both for the rest of their days—if they had any more days left to count.

He got to his feet, somehow, and staggered away with her into the storm, away from that nauseating splotch of human remains protruding from the ice.

They came to a snow bank alongside more boulders and threw themselves upon it to rest. They lay there and tried to let their racing hearts calm down. And as they lay there, Cold and the Unknown seemed to loom up at them out of the storm like a two-headed ogre. Two exhausted people, alone in a lost world, without even the hope of surviving.

Janice came close to Rocky and looked down at his face. She lifted her leather strap and he saw her blue-green eyes again. They were blurred with tears that had not been caused by wind or cold. She lifted the strap from his own face.

There are rare times in life when circumstances and human feelings are beyond words or thought. This was such a time. The past and all the tangles and snarls of Man's synthetic concepts dissolved, leaving nothing but two human beings.

Janice was lying across Rocky's chest, her face buried in his neck. He heard her crying and he kissed her cheek. Then he felt lips against his such as he had never known before. The frantic pressure behind them and the feverish warmth of her breath told an irrepressible story of human need, desire, confusion and helplessness.

His left arm went around her and she responded in turn. There was no thought of the past, of profession or other circumstances. There was only the present moment. Aside from an overflow of normal emotions, the tremendous shakeup of their nerves had produced a hysteria whose antidote seemed to be this frantic, unspoken response, each to the other.

It was like clinging to the warmth and reality of Life in the very palm of the hand of Death . . .

So far, Rocky's expectations had been realized. He had witnessed a miracle each day before breakfast for the last two days. It took them that long to cross the *Kwung Djawa* glacier. The miracle was, they were still alive!

Janice had demonstrated another of her peculiar talents by resetting his arm in its socket. Although it was very sore he could use it. He had done a lot of wondering about Janice and he had tried to draw her out by questioning, but she still maintained her wall of mystery. She was friendly and still somewhat affectionate, but the passionate outburst after the episode of the crossing of the crevasse was never repeated. Nor did either one discuss it. Rocky was stumped. He could not figure her out. Still, he fully intended to do so before he was through. By the time they reached the plateau where the radar station and the abandoned airfield were, the storm had cleared up. A painfully brilliant sun made the world look as though it were covered with glaring white porcelain.

"What do you expect to do about this place?" Rocky asked Janice. "Wherever we're going, we'd better get, because there are big storm-clouds over that mountain to the West. If those come our way we'll be snowed in for a month, and we haven't got grub to last us more than another week. Do you know where we're going from here?"

"I'm going to see if there's enough of that radio transmitter left to get a message through," said Janice.

"Since when do nuns dabble in radio?"

Janice did not answer. They had already reached the ice-encrusted station house and she was making a hasty inspection. The place was almost completely buried under snow. Just about a foot of the windows were showing. There were other buildings behind, which housed portable shops. One lump in the yard appeared to be an abandoned snowplow. Rocky was thinking of the giant rocket transport jobs that had carried all this equipment over the Himalayas. And to think that the Democratic nations were fighting a losing battle! He itched to get back to civilization, but his hopes of getting back were very faint. Both of them were exhausted, and the hardest part of the uncertain trail was still ahead.

"Thank God!" he heard Janice say. "Directional beam antenna, and still intact! I hope the gears can be thawed out. Come on, Rocky, we've got to get inside and see if anything is left of the transmitting equipment, and what generating system they've got. On that depends everything!"

"For instance *what?*"

"Any ordinary power supply system would have deteriorated by now in this cold, except for one new type, which I hope they have. If I can send a message I might be able to get us picked up in a rocket ship. How would you like that?"

"With the Democratic forces fighting a losing battle, who is going to

worry about us out here or risk a ship to pick us up, even if they could find us?"

"There are certain people who might be interested, if they knew I was alive."

"Who, for instance?"

Janice kicked in a window. "My father," she replied.

"He must be a big shot," said Rocky, testily.

Again, Janice did not choose to reply. She was beating the devil out of that window. Rocky helped her and soon she was sliding down inside. Rocky had to do a lot more kicking before he could make a hole big enough for himself, but he finally managed it.

Inside, they experienced an unusual relief from wind and the eternal white glare. Gratefully, they removed their mittens and eye straps. Janice threw back her fur-lined headpiece and her coppery hair flooded her shoulders and framed her face.

Rocky walked up to her deliberately, and she waited for him. He took her in his arms and looked for a half minute at her blue-green eyes, and her nose with its little patch of freckles, and her full lips. Then, while her arms went around his neck, he kissed her.

Finally, she pushed away. "Rocky," she said, "we've got a lot to do. Let's wait until we get somewhere where we are not the victims of our peculiar situation, where we can think clearly. You may regret your feelings for me when you really find out about me."

"That's considerate," said Rocky, not letting her go, "but I know what I want. All I want to find out about you is when you're going to drop this nun disguise and your fake charity for the lamps of China or whatever it is you pretend to be working for—and be a woman! I want to marry you, Janice."

Janice smiled, and those old sparks of mystery flashed in her eyes. "Rocky," she said, "I want you to kiss me once more, but it will be the last time we'll ever even mention the fact that we were attracted to each other until we get back to civilization—*my* civilization."

"That's a funny remark. What do you mean by *your* civilization?"

For answer, Janice drew his lips to hers and kissed him lingeringly, as he had never been kissed in his life. Somebody was playing a harp in the middle of a symphony of springtime canaries, up inside Rocky's head. When Janice was through with him, he went over in a corner and sat down on a chair.

"I've been through a lot," he complained, "but this is *too* much!"

The smile on Janice's face was gone. Her face was a mask of concentrated determination as she approached the radio transmitting equipment. She looked precisely like a highly specialized physicist might have looked upon walking into his laboratory to see the results of a vital experiment.

Then, suddenly, she cried out with relief. "What luck!"

Rocky got up and sauntered over, rubbing his nose, which was thawing out. "What's up?" he said.

Janice pointed to a little gray box

in a corner that was connected to several valves and pipes. "This is a late model station," she said, "except for those antiquated condensers. Look! They have installed one of the new nuclear energy units here. They only came out six months before I left China."

"What kind of a gadget is that?"

"It's a generator, stupid! It generates steam, really, in a closed system that leads to a turbine and an electric generator in the next room. But what makes the steam is a little nuclear energy storage box about one cubic inch in diameter, which, in itself, costs about three thousand dollars."

Rocky's fur headpiece was off, also, and now he scratched his red mop of hair as he looked at her. "You got me," he said. "At least I'm dead sure now that the nun habit was a disguise. I'd give three square meals and a cup of American coffee to know who you really are and where or how you were trained—and for what purpose. Well, now that you've found what you want, get your message through. We haven't time to waste."

"Not so fast!" said Janice. "I've got about a day's work ahead of me before I can hope to get this rig to working. And you've got to help me!"

Close to midnight Janice had things working. Spares had been located, the generating system had been put to work, and the steam system was used to warm up the station by means of special radiators designed for the purpose, as well as to run the turbine that turned the electric generator. The only real trouble was arcing due to chipped insulators whenever she tried to use the full load for which the transmitter was designed. But she compensated for power limitations by making full use of the directional beam antenna. Rocky could only stand by and watch her in amazement.

But his jaw really dropped when she picked up the phone and started "CQ-ing" in German! She was deliberately trying to contact a station somewhere in Germany! The Germans had long since become a fifth rate nation in Europe, Rocky remembered, and they must have become by now just another link in the chain of the Russian dominated New World States. If Janice were an enemy agent, she would be speaking in Russian with New Moscow. Still, he frowned at her as she continued her calls. What could he do? He got himself a chair and sat down to watch her. He had never been confronted with such a mystery in his life as he had found in this many-faceted, coppery-haired woman.

Janice got her station after about a half hour of trying. What came over the ether to her ears alone, and what she answered back, was something which Rocky was not able to figure out.

He saw her face turn pale with amazement and fright at what she heard. He heard her plead and threaten and cry out in angry protest. She argued, she fought the bad reception, overloaded the insulators, arced out, reduced and increased power, got purplish flash-backs in the rectifiers. She

played the transmitter like a frantic composer at the console of an organ. And she cried and perhaps even swore. Rocky did not understand German, but he knew she was undergoing a terrific strain.

Finally, she shut off the equipment and sat back in her chair, looking at the cold meter panels with a horrified expression on her face. She looked at him and tried to speak, hut seemed unable to think in English.

"Es ist ganz gar unglaublich! 'S'ist nur ein höllischer traum!" she exclaimed. "Solch unmögliches ding werde niemals geschehen haben! Es *kann* nicht sein!"

Rocky got up and pulled her to her feet. "Snap out of it!" he harked at her. "Speak English! What happened? Who were you talking to?"

The glaze of mental shock was still on her eyes. She seemed to be looking inward, into her own self. "They —they don't *need* me anymore!" she almost screamed. Wouldn't let me speak to father! Don't need me, after five years of—of—"

"Don't need you for *what!*" insisted Rocky, still holding her in an iron grip.

"They don't want me to go to Agarthi—want me to keep out! They say it would endanger their cause for me to go there now!"

Rocky was mad. He had had enough. He shook her violently until the glaze in her eyes disappeared and he knew she was looking at him.

"Say, what the hell *is* this, Janice!" he shouted at her. "Whose side are you fighting on in this war, anyway?"

Now she was suddenly calm, although still breathing hard. Her eyes were narrowed and icy cold. "The war," she said, "is over. Der Krieg ist ja ganz kaput gegangen, und uber die Welt geht etwas ganz verschiedenes los! 'S'ist wie die Götterdämmerung!"

"Oh, shut up that Heinie language and start talking sense!" Rocky yelled. "I've had enough of this! Now you tell me what this is all about, dammit!"

"I'll tell you something," she said, "if you'll get your big paws off of me, you ox!"

Rocky released her and she started talking. "The war," she repeated, "is over."

"That's too bad!" said Rocky, sarcastically. "Who won?"

"Neither the Democratic nations, *nor* the Russians—*nor* the Asiatics," she answered.

Rocky's hrows went up a notch. "Then who?"

"Suppose I told you," she said, "that the war was won by a group of beings who came to Earth from the depths of interstellar space?"

Rocky gulped. "They told you that over the radio?"

"You don't believe me?" she complained.

"We'll put it on ice for the time being. First tell me what this Agarthi business is all about."

"That I won't need to tell you about," she answered, "because I am going to take you there." There was a stubborn glint in her eyes as she remembered the command she had received from Germany *not* to go there.

"Where is it?"

"About fifty miles from here. You were talking about the storm clouds over the mountain west of here. That happens to be Amnyi Machen, higher than Everest. All we have to do is follow our noses to its hase, about a two day's walk, and there, somewhere close, is Agarthi."

"On the mountain—at this altitude?"

"No—*in* the mountain. There are several hidden entrances."

"You mean—there's a place there, inside the mountain? *People* living there?"

"Not only that. They are a very superior people, and their civilization and science is thousands of years beyond that of the outer world."

"Horse feathers! What makes you think so?"

Janice shrugged her shoulders, helplessly. "To tell you what it's all about," she said, "I'd have to take a month's time and go over all orthodox teachings of religion, history, science and philosophy, and then I'd only be ready to begin. You're asking me something impossible under the circumstances. Suppose we just go there and let Agarthi explain itself."

"If there is an Agarthi, what was your original purpose in going there?"

A shadow came across Janice's face as her mind returned again to her recent conversation with Berlin. She hit her lip and got that inward staring look in her eyes. "I can't tell you," she said. "Now they don't want me to go there, because it will spoil their plans, and I—after five years, and after getting this close to the goal! I can't turn back. I've *got* to go there!"

"*Who* doesn't want you to go there?" asked Rocky, in desperation. "I'm going crazy!"

"Oh, I can't tell you, so let's skip it!"

"And let's skip Agarthi, too," said Rocky. "You have no proof that it's there, and we can't afford to go exploring. We have to head due south for Dakmar!"

"Tso Lan Chi told me that Agarthi is inside of Amnyi Machen," said Janice.

"Why should *he* tell you? And how would he know?"

"That's where he got the Sword of Agarthi that you are now wearing. He told me where Agarthi is, because he wanted *you* to go there."

Rocky looked at her curiously. "Did he say that?"

"His last words to me were that he hoped you could find your way to Agarthi, because you have a fighting heart, and it is in Agarthi, so *he* says, where the greatest battle is being fought—the one that will really decide the fate of the world."

"But how can a hidden city underneath the Himalayas influence the world?"

Janice was looking over Rocky's shoulder at a vision of her own conjuring. "The extra-terrestrial beings who disrupted the surface world's war left Agarthi in charge of the entire planet," she said. "That's what they just told me over the radio. In one year's time, Agarthi is supposed to take over all the governments of

the Earth, under their leader, who is known simply as the King of the World."

"Oh yeah? And what do you suppose the world has got to say about that? Do you think for one minute that they're going to stand by and be dictated to by some flea-bitten crackpot from the hill country? Don't be silly!"

Janice sighed. "There is much you have to learn," she said.

Rocky got to his feet. "Well, dammit, let's learn it then! We start for Agarthi at the crack of dawn!"

The next two days of their journey were the most difficult of all. Their trail toward mighty Amnyi Machen led through soft, new drifts, and to make it worse, the big storm Rocky had seen was beginning to break over their heads. Darkness and thickly falling snowflakes obscured the sight of their goal, and they might have wandered in a circle had Rocky not possessed a compass.

But their extra labors in the soft snow at this altitude got the best of them. First Janice would "black out" and then Rocky would have to lie down and let his pulse slow up. But neither of them dared to remain motionless for long, for fear of the cold sleep that has no awakening.

Abruptly, toward evening of the second day, they came to the mountain's granite wall. It rose interminably up into the clouds from its sixteen thousand foot "base."

Here Rocky stopped and looked at Janice. "Well, maestro," he said to her, "you name it. Where do we go from here?"

"There is an entrance somewhere," she said. "We just have to keep looking."

"And if you're just crazy and there isn't any Agarthi? I suppose you know we'll never make it out of here to Dakmar. It's curtains, baby! Curtains!"

"My! My! What happened to our brave Knight of the Ancient Blood?" retorted Jancie, as they staggered along the cliff wall.

Rocky was so mad he could not find an adequate remark to make. Moreover, conversation was interrupted by the appearance of a crevice in the cliff wall. It was about nine feet high and three feet wide. But when they looked in they saw that it only went back about twenty feet and then came to an end.

"At least we can stay here for the night," said Rocky.

"We'd freeze in there," said Janice. "Sleeping in a snowpit under your tarpaulin is better."

Just then, a strange sound was heard, and both Janice and Rocky stood there listening and looking upward. At first, it sounded as though a cyclone were approaching. Then it seemed like an earthquake. Suddenly they heard an ominous crashing and thundering, and in another moment bits of rock and ice began to plunge into the snow around them.

"Avalanche!" shouted Rocky. "Quick! Inside that cave!"

They had no sooner gotten inside than the entrance was closed upon them.

Incalculable tons of rocks, earth

and ice thundered down outside, covering the cave so thoroughly that all sound of the avalanche was blocked out. They could only feel it shake the mountain. If they had had dynamite and shovels they could never have escaped from the imprisoning depths of the debris and the awful weight of great blocks of granite bigger than a house.

The finality of their situation left them speechless for a while. Rocky felt he could have made some sarcastic remarks, but he did not have the spirit to express them. So they sat there together in the blackness of their tomb.

"Well," said Rocky, finally, "I wish I could offer some encouragement, kid, but you know this rather places me at a disadvantage. However, at least I have pleasant company. Yes, here we die. I always entertained a different idea of the place where I'd finally turn up my toes. You're a scientist of sorts. How long do you think we've got left in here?"

"The air? Oh, it should last for an hour—perhaps less. This is a pretty small space, and it's completely sealed. Strange," she mused. "I should be hysterical or something, but my eyes are so dry they burn."

"Janice, tell me. Did you ever *really* believe in this Agarthi?"

"Rocky, I can say here in the gates of the Hereafter that Agarthi exists. It is here somewhere close. I have proofs of it, but they are not with me. They are back home."

"And you say that Tso Lan Chi was there once?"

"Yes, that's where he got that golden sword he gave you."

For a long while they were silent. The cold was beginning to penetrate their bones. Finally, Janice pressed close to him.

"I may get hysterical yet," she said. "Rocky, let me die in your arms!"

For answer, he held her close to him, but he said nothing. He had taken out the Sword of Agarthi and was holding it in his hand, wondering about old Tso Lan Chi's high respect for the trinket.

"Look!" he said. "That sapphire or whatever it is glows in the dark!"

In his hand, the sapphire stared at them both like a luminous eye, illuminating the entire miniature sword.

"Radioactivity," murmured Janice. "I wonder what the purpose of that is."

Asphyxiation and the cold combined to discourage conversation. Rocky felt Janice hug him tighter, felt the fear in her that was consuming them both. So this was it! A hell of a way to die! Life lingered sweetly in the last corners of his consciousness. He wiggled his fingers and toes and marveled at the fact that this intricate miracle of life, his strong, human body, was soon to be nothing but the dust from which it came.

His hand found Janice's face. She had torn open her collar to get air and he suddenly knew the still vigorous warmth of her soft throat. He saw youth's inimitable promise dashing to bits in the pit of Extinction, and he cursed that that perfect skin had to be replaced by yellowing

parchment peeling from souring bones.

Once he shouted in desperation, and Janice cried, then she went to sleep, unconscious. A big lump came into Rocky's throat. He felt Death's presence beside him in the darkness, shaking out his black cloak of Oblivion in which they would be engulfed forever . . .

Deep inside Amnyi Machen lies Agarthi. It is a subterranean country distributed over a series of connected caverns, having its capital city, Agarthi, in one of the larger spaces. No natural caverns, these. They were made by the science of a race of men at a time when the events precipitating Man's exodus from paradise had not yet transpired, though they had already been foreseen. Great rays of disintegration, fed by an awful concentration of atomic energy, had melted and puffed away the rock in smoke, later fusing the walls thickly into superhardened layers of strength that offered more than the resistance of steel. Here have abided, ever since, a group of the wise descendants of those ancient gods of which Nordic and Roman and Grecian and many other folk legends tell. In fact, Amnyi Machen was long ago and is today nothing else than the real Mount Olympus, where Zeus was supposed to dwell. It was and is Valhalla.

Since ancient times, antiquity and the changing physical conditions of the solar system have caused this race to lose much of its former greatness, but still they are the greatest wisemen on Earth, especially that mystic genius, old as Methuselah yet ever young, who is known as the King of the World . . .

Deep within the foundations of Agarthi, a young Agarthian neophyte chanced to walk through one of the guard ray rooms and found the sole operator sleeping. He smiled at him knowingly and paused to look around at the instruments. Now that the race from Space had ended the war in the outer world these ray guards were enjoying a holiday. In a way, it was futile to spy with the visirays on the surrounding country outside or through the stench-filled cities of the dead. It was all empty routine now, except for the King's own special ray guards with their new, sealed orders, for in the common run of duty there was nothing to look for.

He was about to pass on through the chamber when a peculiar sound arrested his footsteps. He looked around, searching for the source of that low, repeated bell-tone. Immediately he saw a rosy light glowing on an instrument panel beside the sleeping operator. Not being entirely familiar with the signals, he awakened the operator.

"What does that mean?" he asked, pointing to the on and off glowing light.

"It means," said the guard sheepishly, "that a friend of the 'Sword' has come to Agarthi and seeks admittance. Sometimes the King or one of the Elder Councilmen gives the Sword to people who are truly of the Ancient Blood. It is a key they may use if

they ever return to The Mountain, for by its electric radiation we are able to locate the wearer and guide him to the hidden entrance."

"I have heard of this," said the blue robed neophyte, "but I have never seen one of the Swords. In what is the radiation contained?"

"In an imitation sapphire. Any friend wearing one of them can be detected as soon as he arrives at The Mountain."

All of a sudden, the ray guard's eyes widened with concern and he turned swiftly to his ray controls.

"Is something wrong?" asked the neophyte.

"Our friend, whoever he is, may be in trouble," replied the guard. "I just recall having inspected the Outside not half an hour ago and a blizzard was in full progress."

"Then you must find him quickly."

But the guard was already busy at that task. With many expert motions among his controls he set to work. Not his speech, but his thought, penetrated miles of rock. He communicated with the minds of other guards in other guard ray posts, his thought impulses magnified to a penetrative sufficient to reach the center of the Earth, if need be. He was asking them to use simple triangulation on the source of the electric force that was activating all their warning lights. And in a matter of seconds he had the location. No running to telephones, no shouting at frantic switch-board operators, no tedious tinkering with radio direction finders. Just thought, and perfectly functioning machines which also thought in their own inhuman way.

The young neophyte stood close by, taking increased interest in the proceedings as the Guard turned to his visiray with the intention of *visibly* locating the lost person who was wearing the Sword of Agarthi.

Deep within incomprehensible mazes, subelectronics came into play which broadcast a magnetic wave of self-adjusting frequency. This was focussed in iconoscopic fashion into a beam which reached the rock and reflected back. But the refractory changes in the reflections gave the key to the rock's harmonics, caused the original beam to change its own frequency until it combined with that of the rock and passed through as though through a tube. By means of an ingenious subelectronic pantograph principle, the length of this beam could always be exactly controlled. And the beam oscillated back and forth between its extremities, thus allowing the visi-scanning tube on the operator's panel to form an image of what was at the opposite extremity of the beam.

At first, a scene from the Outside came into focus. The screen was dark with the obscurity of the storm and the densely falling snowflakes. Soon, the range of the beam was shortened and they saw the ponderous, fresh debris left by the avalanche.

"That looks as though it had just happened," observed the neophyte.

"And it also looks as though our friend were inside that mass of debris somewhere."

"Then he must surely be dead."

"No. When the wearer of the

Sword dies, so does the electric force in the sapphire, because it is borrowed from the life energy of the wearer."

"Then observe," said the neophyte, pointing at the rosy light on the panel. "The signal light is losing its intensity."

"Then that surely means that our friend is dying," said the operator. "I must locate him at once!"

He shortened the beam still more, sweeping it slowly back and forth, and finally he found the small cave. There they saw the feebly glowing sapphire on Rocky's Sword of Agarthi, hut they could not see Rocky or Janice.

"Must have a light," said the operator, flicking switches and turning dials.

Out along the beam, superimposed on its own wave pattern much as sound impulses are superimposed on electromagnetic waves, went a harmonizing beam the frequency of which was in the visual range. The buried cave glowed suddenly with a reddish light which heightened to yellow as the operator tuned his beam. And there they saw plainly the dying pair, huddled together on a heap of rubble, their fur-lined head-pieces fallen back on their necks.

"Two of them," commented the neophyte. "A powerful man with hair like fire, and a heautiful young woman whose hair is like copper. They have come a long way alone in terrible country, seeking Agarthi."

"Sir," said the operator, "we must contact the laboratories at once. The only thing that can get them out of that tomb is a teletransporter. I will call Mandir.

No sooner had he said this than there formed on the regular televisor, alongside the visiscreen, the image of a very ancient man. His kindly face was wrinkled and his hair was snow white, but his grayish blue eyes glowed with wisdom and a lingering, inner youthfulness.

"Yes?" he said, in a soft, calm voice.

When the young neophyte respectfully explained the emergency, Mandir (who was more than a thousand years old) said that he would personally attend to the matter. And so he did, while the Neophyte and the Ray Guard continued to watch the proceedings with the instruments which were at their disposal. The rosy light in the signal disc was now barely discernible.

Mandir connected himself immediately with the Laboratories to contact the world famous Russian scientist who had come to them as a refugee from the Outside, Dr. Julius Borg, the surface world's greatest scientific genius, in spite of an unsavory past which he was now repenting.

The doctor was a shrunken man with a hig, grizzled head, a pock-marked face, and a clay-like complexion. Iron gray hair, short clipped, stuck out on his head like the bristles of a brush.

"Dr. Borg," said Mandir, "I understand you have become a specialist in operating the teletransporter."

"I have dedicated some particular concentration to them in the past three months," Dr. Borg admitted.

"Have you any subjects to transport?"

"Yes, two. And it appears that haste would be advisable, inasmuch as they are dying."

Borg scratched the ever persistent, scraggly stubble on his chin, reflectively. "I have no authority," he said, "to operate the teletransporter, myself, where human beings are concerned, and I presume you are referring to such. The effect of the transporter's first stage, where matter is transformed into equivalent energy, is to produce instantaneous death. You are no doubt familiar with the fact that existence, that is, life's own vital energy, is subject to the laws of inertia to a certain extent. Life lingers a fraction of a second during first stage transference, and it is that small moment of suspension which makes the teletransporter possible. Matter is reintegrated in the receiver so rapidly that life takes up again where it left off. But to transport someone by such means requires supreme authority, as it involves *taking* human life and *giving* it. Moreover, if the subjects are in a moribund state, as you say, then I should consider the matter to be exceptionally delicate. Revivication and stimulation would be required before the transportation can take place."

"I am an Elder," smiled Mandir. "If you feel capable of performing the teletransportation I can give you full authorization to do so."

"Unfortunately," said Borg, "the Master Scientists have all gone temporarily. I am alone in the Laboratories, except for Mr. Germain and his wife."

"Ah, Mr. Germain, the hero of Agarthi," said Mandir, almost with a trace of forbidden enthusiasm in his voice. "I did not know he had returned from Nepal. He and the lovely Lillian can aid you."

Germain and Lillian stood close beside Borg as he spoke to Mandir. Germain's face was that of an Indian, a heritage handed down from a long since departed Sioux Indian woman. His high cheekbones and enigmatic, far-seeing black eyes under forward jutting brows gave him the appearance of an ancient tribal chieftain contemplating war. Lillian, tall, shapely, cool, looked concernedly at Mandir's image on the screen. Her blue robe (not of the neophytes) was touched off by a spectacular corsage of red and yellow flowers from Agarthi's culture gardens.

"The poor things!" she said, breaking into man's austere convention in a typically feminine way. "Here these subjects you mention are dying and you haggle over formalities!"

"Begin at once," said Mandir. "I shall come personally to receive the visitors in the name of the King, for he, too, is absent at the present time."

Dr. Borg looked at Germain. "Stand by. I need your assistance." He reached for his gnarled, ever-present iron-wood cane with its heavy ivory death's head on the handle. His gold Scientist's robe hung grotesquely on him as he limped toward the giant mechanism known as the teletransporter.

"How do you think *I'm* going to help you?" exclaimed Germain. "I

don't know beans about that thing!"

Borg looked at him not without a touch of professional pride. "You forget that superman's brain I have given you," he replied. "Relax and probe my mind for a few minutes. Follow my thought processes as I prepare the teletransporter. You will soon know as much about it as I do. We don't keep any secrets around here."

Germain and the King and Mandir, plus a handful of other Elders, were the only men in Agartbi who were capable of sustained straight telepathy without the use of the psycbic augmentation machinery. Germain was more proficient than anyone else in this art, except for the King, perhaps, who had never really demonstrated what be might be able to do.

While Lillian stood by in understanding silence, Germain sat on a bench with closed eyes and probed the mind of Dr. Borg. He always liked to get into Borg's mind, especially when he let his barriers all the way down like this, because it was so powerful and vast in its ramifications. Here were flowering plains of knowledge, the results of deep specialization in many of the major fields of learning, in a dominating atmospbere of mysticism, all accompanied by the most unexpected thought form growths, whicb represented tbe flexibility and inventiveness of a great genius.

By the time Borg had checked the position of the subjects, through the ray guard who had first located them, Germain knew enough to be of assistance, though he still lacked physical skill with the controls.

Although Borg could not read minds he knew that Germain was reading his, so he refrained from speaking to him. Instead, he thought at him.

First I have to give them a big jolt of beneficial stimulator, he thought, *as well as fresh air. They must be fully revived before I can teletransport them. To do so in their weakened state might lose them their lives for good.*

For practice in using the teletransporter, Borg concentrated on a sending chamber full of air. When the chamber was energized, the air molecules vibrated so swiftly that they gained mass and Relativity took effect whereby matter became energy. The energy was transformed into electromagnetic equivalents and beamed through the mountain to the buried cave where Janice and Rocky lay. There this energy became the plaything of converter impulses which jolted the energy back into its original material form—air.

You forgot one thing, telepathed Germain to Borg.

I know, replied Borg, in his own mind, *I increased the air pressure there by one atmosphere, since it is a sealed chamber. But they can stand it. Now I'll pass them the stimulation.*

Along the path taken by the previous beams went rays of constructive energy which were capable of revitalizing the life forces in every cell of the human body. In the visiscreen they saw the figure of the red-headed giant stir. He opened his eyes and

looked about him in amazement to find that buried chamber lighted. (The original ray guard was still performing this service.) He also looked shaken when he sensed the tremendous forces of life that were welling up in his body, and when he smelled the fresh air. It was enough of a mystery to stagger his mind.

With an unmistakeable expression of tenderness, he turned to his female companion and called her name. Finally, she, too, opened her eyes. She lay there and looked up at him with a stunned expression on her face.

Borg lost no time. Calling upon Germain to focus precisely on the red-headed man he energized the beam. The matter of Steve Rockner's body disappeared, became invisible energy. Then Lillian saw him materialize abruptly in the receiving chamber beside her, fur lined suit, boots, pack and all. He looked about him dazedly.

"Get him out quickly," said Borg. "We must waste no time in bringing the girl." He bent over the instrument panels carefully. He and Germain appeared to Lillian as though they were playing a duet on a twenty-fifth century organ.

She opened the massive, transparent door of the chamber, and Rocky wobbled out weakly. "You are all right," she told him. "Just relax."

"Janice!" he exclaimed, looking in back of him. "Where is she?"

"She's due in on the next plane," smiled Lillian. "Watch!" She pointed to the receiving chamber, the door of which she had just closed.

Rocky looked about him for one brief moment at the vast cavern laboratory filled with titanic machines which were beyond his comprehension. He tried to stabilize his reeling mind by looking at Lillian who was not at all difficult to look at. Then he looked at the receiving chamber. There on the floor lay Janice, apparently unconscious.

"Janice!" he exclaimed. "Janice! My God! She needs help! Open that door!"

He fumbled frantically with the unusual latch mechanism, but he failed to open it. He kicked the transparent metal door, thinking it was only glass, and he nearly broke his foot. Then he looked in desperation at Germain and Borg, who were approaching him.

Borg was limping worse than ever and was frowning. "The girl is lost," he said. "She was not adequately revived. Her ego, the inner life identity, failed to cross over."

In one flash of action, Rocky snatched Borg off his feet and was shaking him like a terrier shakes a rat. "What have you done to her!" he shouted.

Germain placed a restraining hand on Rocky's ponderous arm. "Set the man down." he said, calmly. "Hysterics will accomplish nothing, my friend." His black eyes cut into Rocky's like a knife and made him become aware of an intelligence that under other circumstances might have humbled him.

But now he threw Borg aside and took hold of Germain's wiry throat. "Tell me what's going on!" he shouted. "I'll kill you, I—I—"

Lightning rammed his brain into immobility. A giant, psychic force had paralyzed him. He could not move, but he could still see Germain. The man impaled him with a stare and hurled thoughts at him that boomed inside his head like the broadside blast of a battleship.

Now you are calm. Think! You are wasting valuable time. I have a plan to save your girl friend. I have never done such a thing before, but I'm willing to try it.

Then Germain released Rocky from his mental grip and turned to open the door of the receiving chamber. At the same time he looked at Borg, who was again on his feet.

"Borg," he said, "give me the maximum of life ray you think I can take —and don't *you* ask questions!" This latter remark was addressed to Lillian who, he knew, was ready to ask him what he intended to do. "Just close this door behind me and don't disturb me."

"But Stephen!" cried Lillian. "Please, darling, don't take any chances!"

Rocky could only stand by and stare at all this in uncomprehending amazement. He knew that something constructive was being attempted, but when he looked at Janice's deathly calm face he felt an urge to jump right out of his skin. He was not a man who enjoyed being helpless.

Germain, inside the receiving chamber, lay down beside Janice and unhesitatingly took her into his arms.

"Hey!" shouted Rocky.

Lillian took hold of his arm. "That's my husband in there," she said. "Relax, will you? I've got worries of my own!"

Rocky looked wonderingly into Lillian's face just long enough to notice that her eyes were blue-green like Janice's. Then he looked quickly back into the receiving chamber of the teletransporter. He saw now that Germain was either unconscious or in the same strange state as Janice, whatever that was. His eyes were closed, his face pale and without expression. His arms were completely around Janice and his face was pressed tightly against hers.

"What's he doing?" said Rocky, tensely. "I don't see how *that's* going to help!"

"He knows what he's doing," said Borg, who stood nearby operating the life ray controls.

"Do *you?*" said Lillian, addressing Borg.

"I think so," he answered. "It has never been attempted before, unless certain ancient legends I have read are true."

"I think I know, too," replied Lillian.

"Well how about letting *me* in on the secret?" said Rocky, impatiently.

"You don't have to believe it," said Lillian, "but I think he has gone searching for her, before she gets too far."

"Searching! *Where?*"

Lillian shrugged her shapely shoulders. "Who knows?" she answered.

Rocky got goose pimples, and he shuddered. . . .

Germain's projected ego drifted through blackness. He was accus-

tomed to projection, but he had never had occasion to search for another disembodied ego. Still, he hoped that his having the girl's body so close to his own would create some affinity between him and her departed self. But he did not know where the "trail" could lead. If the Powers of Beyond were in the custom of claiming their own immediately, he could not hope to find her. However, if there were a waiting place, an earthly plane, where the departed had to become orientated, if there were a period of helpless wandering, perhaps he could locate her before he had to go too far for his own safety.

Janice! He thought in the Well of Nothing. *Janice!*

He heard the distant sound of wailing. Someone was calling out in Hindustani, but he knew the thought behind those words.

Mother! Mother! Where art thou hiding from me?

Suddenly the voice was close to him and he realized that a small, dead child was crying out pitiably for his mother, not knowing that he was dead.

Beyond this voice, Germain heard the voices of thousands of this day's newly dead, over China, Mongolia, Tibet, Nepal, and India, all searching for light, and he withdrew from the sound, fearing that in that direction he would become lost.

Who art thou? He heard the child again directly beside him.

Janice! He sent out his call once more.

Please help me find my mother! said the child.

Germain thought bitterly of the misery of life in suffering India and of how many were dying prematurely each day. And suddenly he realized how important it was for him not to lose his way here. He had to return to carry on his work with the King of the World, because they and the Elders and the neophytes and Borg and all Agarthians were going to put an end to that suffering and this dying of children before their time.

Please take me to my mother! insisted the child, refusing to be separated from him.

You must go on ahead, he told the child. *There are many people there waiting for you.*

But where am I, and why is it so dark?

Janice! called Germain. He could not take much more of this.

Rocky! came a voice nearby. *We're dead! We're dead!*

I'm dead! cried the child. *Mother, why didst thou let me die! I have not lived!*

Janice! cried Germain, desperately.

Here I am, Rocky! she said. And she was beside him. He sensed her presence now even more strongly than that of the child's.

Quick! he said. *Come with me!*

Oh take me with thee! cried the child.

Who is that? said Janice.

Come with me, Germain repeated, and he concentrated on a connection with his physical body.

At first, there was a tendency to drift toward the wailing multitude of the dead, but gradually their mutterings faded. However, it was diffi-

cult to keep Janice beside him.

Stay with me! he told her.

It is difficult, she replied. *We are off the course, going the wrong way.*

Wrong way! Wrong way! cried the child.

Germain wondered if his disembodied ego could go insane. He hoped not, because that child spirit might do it to him before long.

Suddenly he was aware of contact with the living body—his body. Before completely succumbing to its attractive force, he said again, *Come with me!* Then he sank into his body and was aware of physical existence. He opened his eyes just before he closed the doors of consciousness on his soul, and he heard a child's voice wailing: *Thou hast cast me out in darkness! Mother! Mother! Thou leavest me dead!*

Before him he saw Janice's blue-green eyes looking at him. Then he felt her lips on his, in fact all over his face. He knew what was happening. It was the life ray, and she was still under the impression that he was Rocky. He jumped to his feet, shaking his head to clear it of dizziness. Janice sat up and looked around her with a very red face. She had not known what she was doing.

The door of the chamber opened and Rocky reached in and pulled her out. She became fully conscious when she saw him, and she was also still riding on the "kick" of the potent life rays. They went into each other's arms and there was nothing for anyone to say about it, or so one would think. But women often have the first word as well as the last, and Lillian exerted her prerogatives now.

"Well!" she said, when Germain stepped shakily out. "My kisses never did *that* to you, I must say!"

Germain looked at her with a wan smile and said, "Quit kiddin', Lil! Something happened! Something—" He could not go on.

She grasped one of his arms and Borg grasped the other. "Mental shock," Borg muttered.

"For him?" Lillian found it hard to believe.

They sat him down in a chair and he bent over, holding his head in his hands and shaking it. He was trying to shake out the sound of the dead child's voice, but it kept swirling around and around inside: *Mother! Mother! Where art thou hiding from me? Mother! Why didst thou let me die? I have not lived! Thou hast cast me out in darkness! Thou leavest me dead! Oh take me with thee!*

Germain's face was contorted with pain. He was gasping. "I'll never forget it!" he said. "Never!"

Rocky and Janice had wandered over, looking at him in bewilderment. She remembered nothing of her "walk in darkness," so she could not fully appreciate his predicament. Mandir had arrived by this time. In an effort to diagnose Germain's malady, he used his telepathic powers to penetrate the other's mind, and now he stood looking at him with deep understanding.

Lillian appealed to Mandir. "What is it?" she cried out in consternation. "What's happened to him?"

"It happened to me once long ago," replied Mandir. "I, too, heard the

tragic voices of the newly dead."

Everyone just stood and looked blankly at everybody else, except Borg and Germain and Mandir. Borg's strange eyes twitched and blinked in double time because he was deep in thought. Germain grasped Mandir's frail hands and looked at him in flaming earnestness.

"They shall not die prematurely!" he said. "Only the wise ones, those who have lived their years, should die, because then they know where they are and there is no wailing and torment in that—darkness! Thank God I'm alive to work at what we've got to do! Ignorance, disease and human misery *must* vanish from the face of the Earth! I heard a dead child crying there in the blackness of death. He said, Why did you let me die? I have not *lived!* You have cast me out in darkness! You leave me dead!"

"Oh Stephen!" Lillian cried. with tears flooding into her eyes. She put her arm around him.

"The whole thing is like a scar on my brain," said Germain. "I'll never forget what that child said!"

Mandir smiled sadly and turned to Rocky and Janice, who stood huddled together like two immigrants. Both of them looked at Germain in irrepressible fascination.

"You may thank Mr. Germain," said Mandir to Janice, "for actually bringing you back from the dead. He is already a neophyte in Man's third stage of development — the Spiritual. Most people have not yet even entered the Mental stage. They are still purely Physical."

Rocky looked quizzically at him. "Is that a crack at us?" he said.

"No harm meant," replied Mandir, gently. "It is only a known fact. Generally speaking, Earth's humanity is only getting ready now to enter into that Millenium of its development which shall be known as the Mental Age. Only after another thousand years will there be a general spiritual awakening. Some of us are merely ahead of the normal scale of development, that is all.

"But I am digressing," he said. "You are strangers to Agarthi. You," he said to Rocky, "are a wearer of the Sword. From whom did you get it?" Mandir already knew, since he had read his mind, but he wanted to know what Rocky would answer.

"From the chief of the village of Chilchu Tsi," replied Rocky. "An old fellow by the name of Tso Lan Chi. He said he had been to Agarthi and spoken to the King. Who is this fellow who calls himself the King of the World?" he asked, not too politely. In the meantime, Janice's mysterious eyes were devouring the details of the Laboratory, precisely the place she had worked five years to get to.

Mandir smiled patiently. "You shall see him when he returns from the deeper caverns," he replied. "For of course we must decide what to do with you."

Rocky glared at Mandir. "I'm afraid my own future has already been decided," he said, "and the decision happens to have been made by myself. I am taking this young lady through to India, so don't entertain any other ideas."

Mandir did not smile, but he was very understanding. "In good time, we shall see," he said.

"Do you mean," said Janice, "that we are prisoners, and that our fate rests in the hands of your king?"

"You are not prisoners in your own sense of the word," replied Mandir, 'but you will be detained here until we have psychoanalyzed you and fully prepared you for entering again into the outside world. In the meantime, you will enjoy every possible comfort and—"

"But just a minute," interrupted Rocky. "I'm an American citizen and I don't stay in anybody's house if I don't care to. I'm afraid I don't like your attitude."

Mandir sighed. "You will come to know us better, in time," he said.

By this time, two young Agarthian men had come into the Laboratory, as though on an unspoken summons from Mandir.

"Escort these two visitors to suitable quarters in the City," he ordered. "They are to be allowed all the ordinary privileges of authorized visitors, except that of leaving Agarthi, until further notice."

Rocky grinned a little. "Look!" he said. "I don't like to play rough around here, but you don't seem to understand. I'm nobody's prisoner!"

Janice patted his arm and said "Take it easy, honey, take it easy! Nobody has hurt us yet!"

The two handsome young Agarthians came to Rocky's side and bowed slightly. They wore white robes which were drawn in neatly at their waists by beautiful wide belts made of some bluish, sparkling metal all worked in intricate filagree. They carried no weapons.

"I'll go," said Rocky, "if you say we're free to leave any time we want."

Mandir suddenly looked sternly at him. "I am sorry," he said, flatly. "Until you can be examined and judged you will do as you are ordered to do."

Rocky grinned and put his fists on his hips, while he winked at a worried looking Janice. "Okay," he said, "just show me the door, because I'm leaving."

The two young Agarthians again smiled and insisted that Rocky and Janice accompany them. But Rocky only looked down his freckled nose at them and grinned.

"Don't let's play games, boys," he said. "I'm holding my ground until I'm recognized as an American. Ever hear about Americans? They're a free people. And as the old song goes, 'Don't fence me in!' "

Germain and Lillian looked significantly at each other. Borg muttered, "Looks like a case for the ray operators."

And so it was. Hidden ray guards who were watching this scene by visi-ray, sprang into action. Beams of subtle energy bathed Rocky's big frame and he suddenly became very sleepy. He looked about him in astonishment.

"Somebody slipped me a Mickey!" he exclaimed. "You bums! I—"

Then he fell to the floor. Janice looked very much embarrassed and somewhat amazed. Lillian came over

to try to make her feel comfortable.

"He's just asleep," she said. "He'll be more reasonable later. I was an American, myself, not long ago. Name is Lillian Germain, and that's my husband, the one you rewarded so generously for saving your life."

While Janice blushed, Germain stood up and came over, smiling. Borg followed. "And this is Dr. Borg," Lillian added.

Janice really opened her eyes as she looked at the eccentric scientist. "Not Dr. Julius Borg, the Russian scientist who invented energy serum!"

Lillian nodded, and Borg snarled graciously. "Yes, my dear," he said. "A year ago I was one of the world's most despised villains, a fanatic, biological experimenter with human lives, author of Russia's hideous mother farms, right hand man of Nicholas the First, Dictator of the New World States. All this I confess, but I have had a reawakening. Here I am doing pleasurable penitence, serving Mankind as constructively as possible."

Janice's intelligent looking eyes narrowed suspiciously for the fraction of a second. Then she recovered her composure.

"Well," she said, hastily, "I guess I'd better get my 'sleeping beauty' out of here. Thank you very much, Mr. Germain, for saving my life however you did it. I still don't quite comprehend it all."

The two Agarthians carried Rocky out of the Laboratory and Janice followed some distance behind.

"Americans!" she muttered to herself with a sneer. "Russians!" Her eyes flashed hateful fire. "And Berlin says they don't need me any more! Ha! There are quite a few things they'd like to know! If they knew about Borg, for example . . ."

In the meantime, hidden ray operators on the telepsychic beams were culling some very interesting, in fact some very astounding information, from her mind. Janice had gravely underestimated Agarthi. But, on the other hand, Agarthi quickly found that it had also underestimated *her!* In fact, Janice and her very sinister connections represented Agarthi's last great barrier, a barrier which had to be forcefully eliminated before their planned Utopia could be brought effectively into the outside world . . .

Agarthi City was not unusually large. Probably only thirty thousand inhabitants. But Janice could not help marveling at the fact that all this was completely subterranean. The man-made cavern was over two thousand feet high, its vast dome reenforced beyond all necessary factors of safety by a layer of *welded rock*, solidified far beyond the hardness of steel by a process which even the present day Agarthians did not fully understand.

Janice stood on the roof of the stone house they had taken her into, her elbows on the stone bannister, gazing out over the somewhat Moorish looking city. The simple but beautiful lines of the architecture, the wide streets and generous spaces between buildings, all garnished by well-arranged exotic flowers, flower-

ing vines, green parkways and artistic fountains and lily ponds, evidenced the character and mentality of these quiet, mystical people. She looked upward at the ball of light in the ceiling of the cave and was somewhat awestruck by what she had been told about that.

It was as old as the cavern. An ancient race of superior beings had placed it there. Here there was a controlled influx of cosmic rays so that the resultaot x-rays in the air would be held at a minimum, thus avoiding that state of sterility that the surface man or woman enters into at the early age of forty or fifty. Here people lived for centuries and could reproduce, if they chose to, at as late an age as one hundred and fifty years. Exceptional cases of longevity, such as Mandir's and the King's, topped one thousand years.

Her father and the whole group of Nameless Ones had underestimated Agarthi in the beginning of their plans. It was more advanced than all reports had intimated. There was something here to be reckoned with, in spite of the tremendous science and power and the world-wide organization of the Nameless Ones. She fully realized now that she had to get back to Berlin and tell them what she knew, so that their cause would not be lost. At this stage of the developments they could not afford to be ioterfered with by any starry-eyed Utopian propagandist such as this King of the World. Janice was convinced that her father was the greatest man on Earth, and that his plan, alone, represented the only practical answer to the world's problems. She reasoned that when she had contacted Berlin hy radio the Nameless Ones had not even wanted to let her father know that she was alive, because if he knew, his important work might be disrupted by attempts at rescuing her. And his work came even before his own daughter, because in that work was involved the fate of a world. Her hard training of the past enabled her to appreciate that point of view and she hlamed no one, now that she had time to consider the probahilities. What she wanted to do was to get back to Berlin and make herself useful to her father.

Still, there was Rocky. In spite of herself, she knew she loved him. He had a frank, dashing way and an air of independence and self-confidence about him that she could oot resist. But then again, the work in Berlin would not fit in with any plans that included Rocky. It would be as unthinkable now to take him there as it would be to take a bull into a China closet. The question was: Which came first, work or *l'affaire de coeur?* She thought she was quite sure of the aoswer . . .

At that moment, Rocky, himself, stepped out on the roof, followed by the two persistent young Agarthians who had carried him out of the Laboratory. He was arguing loudly with them, but they did not speak English. And when Janice saw him she started to laugh.

"I don't care if you guys happen to like to walk around in your bath-

robes all day," he was saying, "but I'll be damned if *I'm* going to do it!" He looked imploringly at Janice and she laughed harder. "It makes me feel I should go to bed and take a nap," he said to her. "I like action clothes. At least they let me keep my boots on!" He looked approvingly at his great, travel worn clodhoppers and then back at Janice.

"Oh Rocky!" she gasped. "You kill me!"

He had on a white robe that was a bit on the small side, and it left a good portion of his chest and arms bare. Ordinarily, a manly pair of arms and the massive square of a powerful chest are becoming, but Rocky was too spectacular for Agarthian standards. His red hair, growing profusely on arms and chest, was bad enough, but his tattoos did him serious harm. Conventional anchors, daggers and rattlesnakes were accompanied by girls' names, a tattooed telephone number, a very buxom mermaid, the seal of the United States, two American flags, and a full-canvased three-masted sailing ship.

"I want sleeves on this thing, at least!" he complained. "Can you talk these guys' lingo? Say—!"

For the first time, he noticed her own costume. It was blue like Lillian Germain's, of a woven plastic material having a silky sheen to it, drawn in neatly at the waist by a filagree metallic belt which looked like silver. With the decoration of her coppery hair, which fell below her shoulders, Janice did not need anything else. She was just naturally spectacular.

"This is the first time I've really seen you!" he exclaimed, and he whistled. "Wow! Babe Ruth never saw curves like you throw! And you've got three strikes on me already!"

Janice beamed at him in that rosy, soft, slightly breath-taking way that all handsome women have about them when they know their prestige is showing. "Who's your gag man?" she said. "He's not bad?"

"All kidding aside, Janice, I've got to do something about this bathrobe business! Just look at me!"

"How can I help looking at you?" she laughed. "I just saw Mr. Germain enter the house. He should be able to help you."

In another moment, Stephen Germain stepped out on the roof to greet them. They both noticed for the first time that his cranium was slightly larger than normal. And Rocky also noted beneath the other's sleek, blue neophyte's robe the lines of a highly trained athlete and fighter. He knew he was going to like Germain, even if he was a mental wizard and slightly cracked, like these other "cultists" (as Rocky regarded all Agarthians).

Germain's unusual eyes took in Rocky's short robe at a glance, and he smiled good naturedly. "We'll see what we can do about that," he said.

"I'll say we will!" put in Rocky. "How long do you guys think you can keep me hanging around this bat-belfry wearing a bathrobe? I want to see this King of yours and give him a piece of my mind!"

"I wish you understood Agarthi a little better," replied Germain, who was studying Rocky with particular

interest. "You know, we could use a man like you."

"Not for my money!" retorted Rocky. "I'm no caveman or spiritualist! I like my whiskey and my religion *straight!*"

"Agarthians," said Germain, "are advanced scientists and mentalists. However, I did not come here to open a discussion on such a vast subject. What I really came to announce is that the King has returned. He will grant you an audience—" Germain looked at a tiny watch which was mounted on a ring on his right hand "—in two hours."

"Good!" said Rocky. "Janice, do you think we can arrange to give His Nibs, the King, some of our time today? I've got to get a new outfit to wear, you know."

Janice looked a trifle embarrassed, and she addressed herself to Germain. "We'll be there," she answered. "We are to come to the palace?" She indicated a vast building at the end of the cavern which seemed to overlook the city as though from a great elevation. It was a striking illusion.

"Yes," replied Germain. He also regarded Janice with particular interest and she, in turn, saw something in his leathery, Indian's face and his brilliant, black eyes that arrested her attention. Mentally, they each seemed to say, *"Touché!"* Before his surveillance she felt mentally naked, and suddenly a great, overwhelming fear arose in her mind.

Yes, Germain's unspoken thought came to her, *I could read your mind if I chose to. I find even its surface thoughts very intriguing—or should I say full of intrigue?*

"I will see you both at the palace," he said to both of them, aloud. He turned to the two Agarthians and spoke to them briefly in their own tongue. Then he went into the house and downstairs.

When Rocky turned to Janice, he found her leaning over the bannister, her fists clenched and her eyes filled with tears. But they were tears of anger and frustration.

"Hey, what's the matter!" he exclaimed, putting his arm around her shapely shoulders.

Janice bit her lip and looked bitterly at the palace of the King. "Oh, Rocky, a woman's a fool!" she cried. "They always think they know so much!"

"They get by," commented Rocky, philosophically, "especially when they're gorgeous. But why the tears, baby? Did that guy Germain hurt your feelings or something?"

"No, no, it's not that! I just should never have come here, that's all! No wonder they said I would endanger their plans by coming here! They knew best, after all!"

"There you go again!" cried Rocky, in desperation. *"Double* talk! Who says *what* plans are endangered if you come here, and why— Oh, skip it!"

"You'd better go get a new outfit for yourself," suggested Janice. "Come back when you're fixed up and we'll go to the palace together."

"I think I'll do that, honey," he said. "You drive me batty, in more ways than one!"

After Rocky had gone, she thought

bitterly of her predicament. And she remembered only too vividly old Tso Lan Chi's admonishment to her: "What could your kind possibly hope to do in Agarthi? Do you underestimate those great wisemen? Do you not think they could read your very mind? How could you hope to spy on them—and to what purpose?"

She remembered also, with chagrin her own words: "Forget the mind reading. That's superstitious nonsense!"

It was a terrible dilemma with which to be confronted. Here she had arrived at Agarthi, the goal which she had been especially trained to reach and take advantage of. Already she had seen and found out things which it would be invaluable for her father to know. Yet it now appeared that Agarthian science was capable of examining every bit of knowledge that was in her head. They would find out about the Nameless Ones, who her father was, the whole, great plan! That's what the King of the World wanted to see her for. He wanted to read these things that were hidden in her mind!

Janice clenched her fists and glared defiantly up at the palace. She had to trick them out of it. She thought deeply and swiftly, searching back through all her extensive training for some straw of hope to cling to.

And suddenly she had it. Her face slowly brightened with a triumphant smile. For a long time she stood there and figured out her plan. Then she walked confidently downstairs to her room.

"Read *my* mind, will they?" she said aloud. "Just let them try!"

The great hallway outside the Agarthian Chamber of Elders in the King's Palace looked like the interior of any other country's Senate Building or governmental headquarters, except that most everybody wore robes and filagree belts and there was not so much noise and confusion.

Janice and Rocky, accompanied by Lillian and Stephen Germain and Dr. Borg, had both been deeply impressed, in spite of their disapproval of Agarthi's attitude toward them.

"Say, maybe this isn't all malarky," Rocky commented to Janice. He now wore a fine fitting white robe with long, full sleeves and a turtle neck collar, to cover all of his tattoos. Around his neck still hung his Sword of Agarthi, which made him look rather princely, at least in Janice's eyes. He turned to Germain. "What is this audience with the King all about?"

"You will be questioned, perhaps, that is all. Agarthi is a hidden country and it is forbidden for strangers to enter here without permission. You wear the Sword, but it was not given to you by Agarthi. We rescued you and Miss Maine as a matter of necessity, because otherwise you would have died, but we have the right of deciding what should be done with you."

"If this is supposed to be a real country, where's the U. S. Consul?" asked Rocky.

"Agarthi is just now beginning to open negotiations for the establish-

ment of such foreign relations through our representative in Chicago."

Janice's eyes widened now. Chicago was the new seat of the U. S. Government. "You actually have a representative in Chicago?" she asked.

"Yes," said Germain, with a slight twinkle in his eyes, "but Chicago is not officially aware of it—yet."

"Say," said Rocky, "who is that guy with the silk turban? He's no Agarthian!"

He pointed out a little fat man with a black beard who was dressed like an Indian maharajah. The man was being escorted with extraordinary ceremony into the diplomatic box of the Chamber of Elders.

"He is the Prime Minister of Nepal," replied Germain. "I brought him here, myself, through the deep tunnels. You see, our negotiations with the Outside have already begun. In fact, I happen to be Agarthi's first Minister of Foreign Relations."

The Chamber of Elders looked very much like a Senate Chamber. A central proscenium with a speaker's rostrum, and the superior rostrum in white onyx above that for the King, the two dozen or more plush seats for the Elders arranged in a half moon below. Old Mandir sat at the speaker's rostrum, now wearing also the formal black of the Elder's Council, and Lillian Germain and Dr. Borg sat in the diplomatic box with the Prime Minister of Nepal. Germain led Rocky and Janice to a table directly below Mandir and told them to be seated there. He, himself, sat down at the table with them.

"Where's the King?" Rocky asked, looking up at the top rostrum.

"He is already there," said Germain, "but he does not choose to be seen at this time."

Janice looked at him intently, hardly believing her ears. She then looked at the empty rostrum and back at Germain. Rocky's ruddy complexion lightened three shades and little beads of perspiration came out on his forehead.

"You mean," he said, swallowing hard, "he doesn't do it with mirrors? You mean the guy's *invisible?*"

"At times, yes," said Germain.

Just then, Mandir spoke. Janice and Rocky could see no microphones but the old man's gentle voice was amplified. He spoke in the Agarthian tongue, but from a tiny receiver on the table came an instantaneous English translation. "The King advises that the unusual aspects of this case require a Closed Council."

"What does that mean?" asked Janice, quickly, almost frightened.

"It means," said Germain, looking deeply into her eyes, "that the discussions will be carried on over telepsychic beams, strictly between the King and the Elders."

"You mean — telepathically, by means of telepathic machines?"

"Yes."

"Are you included?" asked Rocky.

Germain said, "Not exactly."

But Janice knew what he meant. He did not *have* to use the beam to know what was going on!

"When do they start?" asked

Rocky.

"They've started," replied Germain.

Mandir's gray head was bent as though in prayer. The assembled Elders only looked quietly at the King's rostrum, as though listening to a lecture. Janice knew now that they would try to probe her brain. Everything depended on how effective her method of evasion was. She could only relax mentally and try not to think, so that her previously administered auto-suggestion might work.

Germain looked at Janice, then at the Elders. The faces of the latter were suddenly clouded with suspicion and deep concern as they looked at Janice. She, however, was unaware of the change and continued in her relaxed mental condition, waiting for the wierd telepathic conference to be ended.

There was a sudden relaxation in the audience of Elders. Rocky looked questioningly at Janice and she looked at Germain.

"It's over with," said the latter, with a faintly detestable expression of satisfaction.

"What's the verdict?" asked Rocky.

"You," said Germain to Rocky, "will be allowed to leave Agarthi whenever you please—*after* you have been shown just one record I have recently made for the Agarthian Library. But that can wait until tomorrow." He got to his feet and prepared to lead them from the Chamber.

"But what about Janice?" Rocky demanded.

"No decision has been reached, as yet."

"Okay," said Rocky, stubbornly, "I want to see the King before we leave. Where is he?"

"The King," said Germain, quietly, "has expressed his desire of seeing Miss Maine personally tomorrow. Is that soon enough, Miss Maine?"

Janice tugged on Rocky's arm. "Quite soon enough, I'm sure," she replied. "Let's go, Rocky!" She had never wanted to vacate a place so urgently in her life as she did this Chamber of Elders. She sensed that something had gone wrong with her trick. They *knew* something! They *could* not, *must* not know everything! Suddenly this whole place had acquired a menacing atmosphere for her. Even the faces of the statues seemed to look knowingly at her as she was escorted out into the corridor. She wanted to kick the stony stares off of their ancient faces.

It was then that a powerful mental voice sounded inside her head.

I shall be waiting for you at ten in the morning. Do not forget, Fraulein von Immerschoen!

Janice stopped and stared into space, completely terrified.

"What's the matter?" asked Rocky.

He caught her in his arms as she fainted . . .

That night in the Laboratories, Dr. Borg demonstrated his remarkable scientific genius. For thousands of years the Agarthian scientists had been the only terrestrials who were capable of effectually repairing the ancient machines of the Elder Race.

In fact, in some cases they had even duplicated a few, actually manufacturing the simpler ones which did not necessarily require extra-terrestrial elements. But now Borg had not only demonstrated his ability to understand the greater machines; he had also turned one of them to a new purpose. The law of gravitation, it is said, was determined by Isaac Newton's observation of a falling apple. The Agarthian *Relative Densifier* was the result of Julius Borg's observation of cavern walls.

He had made a minute examination of the super hard welded rock of the caverns with a sub-electronic microscope and had arrived at the same conclusion as the Agarthians—that some process had been used, after melting the rocks, whereby the lava was actually reduced in molecular structure, *densified* by means of reducing the spaces between particles of matter. In other words, the actual Subcosmos in this case had been relatively reduced and become more compact.

Borg, fascinated by this revelation, had pursued the subject further and finally produced, in a more flexible form, the mechanism whereby this process was accomplished. Agarthi was in possession of the ancient type of tunnel building equipment, which included rock-welding generators. But Borg's version had a brand new and startling application.

He showed a Collie dog in a transparent chamber, living under several atmospheres of air pressure. The dog barked, wagged its tail, showed on the scales that it weighed sixty pounds, and in every respect looked healthy and normal—*except that it was only one inch high!* And when it walked across a pine plank it made deep footprints in it, as though it were going through soft snow.

There were many other startling applications. The *Relative Densifier* was to surgery what photographic enlargement was to astronomy, but in reverse. Delicate lights and cameras and surgical instruments for minute operations inside the human body could, after being made as small as possible by delicate machinery, be reduced a thousand times if necessary, even small enough to work *inside* of individual body cells and thus open wide the field of microsurgery.

Or in a military sense: a complete staff of special agents and a laboratory full of equipment could be smuggled into a country inside a suitcase—if the suitcase were made of very thick steel and one had a portable derrick . . .

At three minutes to ten, an Agarthian orderly called Janice and she knew her time had come. "I'll see you afterward," she said to Rocky and kissed him like she had at the abandoned radar station.

When Rocky swam his way out of the rosy fog, Janice was gone. But in her place was another radiant vision of loveliness that almost befogged him again. It was Lillian Germain, wearing one of her prettiest smiles.

"Hello!" she said.

"H-hello, yourself!" Rocky re-

plied, dazedly.

"You have to keep your promise to my husband," she said, "and come see that record he has prepared."

"Now?"

"Why not? It will relieve the tension."

She put out her hand and he took it. It was soft and warm and friendly. Rocky followed her . . .

The King, Janice was told, would receive her in his Meditation Chamber. In spite of her mental preoccupation over the ordeal to come she could not refrain from marveling at the breathtaking magnificence of the empty room itself. One walked on invisible glass, as though in empty space. Below was a perfect illusion of brilliant stars and planets — interstellar space itself. The dome of the room held the same illusion, so that it seemed she was suspended somewhere among the stars. From behind a great chair, which was made of semi-translucent black onyx, a light, like the zodiacal light of the sun, spread out like a ghostly fan against a background of seemingly distant nebulae and star clusters.

The room had only three walls. Where the fourth wall should have been was a twelve foot square gap that appeared to lead into the impenetrable blackness of the Pit, itself. It was not ordinary darkness. It was like an infinite abyss, as though it were a door through which strange beings could come from another dimension. She shrank from it.

She realized, with a start, that someone was sitting in the chair, obscured by the tall back. A large hand reached out from it and she saw that it was pointing to a lounging chair in front of the larger chair. The hand was not wrinkled with age. It was strong but gentle looking, and it was that of a man in the prime of life. The extended arm was clothed in a copious sleeve of cloth of gold.

"Please be seated," said a voice that was the synthesis of all the pleasing qualities which a man's voice should possess.

Somewhat reassured that the person with whom she was dealing must be a more normal human being than she had thought, she went quickly to the indicated chair and sat down facing the King.

Before her she saw a man dressed in a robe of shimmering cloth of gold. He was a larger man than Rocky. She reasoned that he must be seven feet tall, and she noted something about his physical structure that plucked at certain instincts within her, or was it racial memory of things beyond recorded time? His physique was herculean, heroic in the epic sense. There was an air of ancient legend about him, and into her mind came recollection of the German's favorite, Siegfried. Again she detected that same magic aura in the riotous mass of curly, golden hair that crowned his head. There was something pagan in him, something holy, and something terrifying. By outward appearances he looked to be thirty-five years old, yet all claims had it that he was almost two thousand years old! Perhaps much, much older!

But the most amazing part about

him was his face—*and* his eyes. He might have been unusually handsome if it had not been for those glistening, bluish black eyes, which were almost disproportionately large. His face, though giving evidence of a firmness of character that was superhuman, was kindness and gentility personified. His upper lip was strangely full, in exactly equal proportion to the lower one, and it caused Janice to remember a lecture she had once heard at the Berlin University, on physiognomy in the work of the classical masters. Such a lip meant benevolence, a feature which was fast disappearing from the face of modern man. Modern upper lips were growing thin and selfish. Here was a mouth that meant love, laughter, generosity, a taste for wine and song, endowed with godly talents of expression. The nose was flared at the nostrils just enough to remind her of a centaur snorting exuberantly after a moonlight gallop through idyllic woodlands. But in those great, deep eyes smouldered the terrors of the Unknown, the power of Life and Death, knowledge of other worlds, other space and time. No, the King was not a normal man, after all.

"So!" said the King. "I am a freak—so old and withered that you could blow me out like a candle, eh?" His strange, other-world mouth curled in a serene smile as he looked at her.

"I—" she stammered, helplessly.

"Irma," he said, calling her by the German name she had discarded years ago in America, "let us examine your case carefully. First of all, you are exceptionally endowed with a rare, vigorous beauty and an intelligence to match it. It is a great pity you are not on our side of this great struggle."

"But I—" she tried to interrupt, but he continued purposefully.

"Your education is exceptional, and most of it was acquired in the United States. Master of Science, Ph.D. in physics, chemist, and an informed student of philosophy. Very athletic, too. Women's ski championship at Ellhofen, 1962. Women's international fencing championship, Olympic Games, Paris, 1963, that time under the name of Greta Schumann. Such a brilliant accumulation of physical and mental assets naturally had to interfere with your personal happiness. So dedicated were you to the 'Great Cause' your father followed that you refused to succumb to the intended destiny of your sex. Think of how many broken hearts you have scattered in your wake. You are so beautiful, yet, like a sorceress all your kinder impulses are circumscribed by the barrier of ulterior motives. Now you have, at last, under the strain of unusual circumstances, fallen in love. It is a pity that you cannot dissolve the barrier walls and forget Berlin.

"Rocky should stay here and fight with us. I wish I could influence you to do the same. But I see I cannot."

All of which amazed and angered Janice. "It seems you take advantage of ordinary people by sticking your mental nose into businesses which do

not concern you!" she retorted.

"On the contrary," said the King, as unruffled as ever. "You happen to cause me a great deal of concern. Let me tell you why. I and Agarthi represent a new type of world, for all Mankind, one which is not merely an idea conceived of by individuals, but one which is the inevitable result of natural laws affecting the evolution of human society. It is a world which would have evolved in general, even in spite of Man's stupidity; but now, owing to the recent liquidation of the Nations, it becomes necessary to create that world quickly, beyond the boundaries of Agarthi, ahead of Nature's schedule. You may ask why this is so urgent, and yet you and the faction you represent are the very reason why.

"Through your connections in Berlin you have long since become acquainted with some of the Ancient Knowledge. For tens of thousands of years madmen have monopolized the surface world, causing humanity no end of suffering, famine, disease, fires and accidents, madness, and above all, *warfare*. But now there is a greater danger than ever. The Elder knowledge may fall into the hands of unscrupulous scientists who will be able to do an even greater harm to humanity. It is my grave responsibility to prevent such a circumstance, yet people like you make that task very difficult."

"What makes you think that it's *your* responsibility?" asked Janice, hotly. "And also, what have *I* got to do with it?"

"To answer your first question, you might say that I have been *assigned* the task by a group of superior beings. To answer your second question, we have only to consider the following:

"You esteem your father, Count Heinrich von Immerschoen, as being a great man, because through his vast and, I must say, very powerful connections he is secretly rebuilding Germany and a machine to control the world. You and he and the others working with you have great faith in a new German super race, although you are blind to the fact that this sort of thing is an old, old formula, which has been tried and tried again in Germany and has failed every time, to the great detriment of the victimized German people. One thing which you believe in I believe in also —rule of intellectuals. But I would qualify that further to—rule of the Wise. Intellectuality alone is not enough. It takes years to acquire wisdom, and usually one becomes too feeble, when he is old and wise, to control the vigorous, young masses of the ignorant. We Agarthians, however, enjoy wisdom with enduring strength, and as there are definite causes of death which can be partially eliminated in the surface world it is to be hoped that under our guidance Man's average span of life will soon be extended. The masses need the help of the wise, at least until such time, perhaps a thousand years hence, when the masses shall have advanced enough to be more wise than ignorant. The present is a time of grave emergency in the history of human society. The problems of Man are

too deep and far reaching to be handled by the masses or by campaigning politicians who, as Mr. Germain has put it, 'cannot see their principles for all the cigar smoke.' So a firm but benevolent *dictatorship of the wise* is now necessary, for under conditions of dictatorship a great efficiency is achieved—and under Wisdom there can be no mass killing and injustice."

"But who is to judge as to who is the wisest and fittest to lead?" interrupted Janice.

"To judge a wise man is very simple," the King replied. "Wisdom is understanding the fundamental laws of Nature and knowing how to apply them. These are at the basis of all things and certainly at the basis of all human affairs. Civilizations have risen and fallen in direct relation with this understanding of the fundamentals. Take, for example, your father and the so called *Nameless Ones* who guide bim. They are not adhering to the prime fundamentals."

"My father is guided by no one!" exclaimed Janice. "He is the leader!"

"An unnecessary confession," said the King. "However, he only *thinks* or *pretends* he is the leader of the New Germany movement."

All of a sudden, Janice realized two startling facts. The King was speaking to her in German. Furthermore, he was telling her things about her father which could not have been in her own mind. Therefore, tbe King had other sources of information. He knew too much. She fingered the pistol inside her robe.

"Tell me more," she said, witb a slightly sarcastic smile. She did not care whether he knew she had the gun or not. Just let him try taking it away from her! She knew that its muzzle was pointed straight at bis massive chest.

"Your father has been amused at Erich Rothbart because the latter does not realize what a catspaw he is. Yet your own father is only a tool in the hands of the *Nameless Ones*. And I wish you knew who the *Nameless Ones* really are, wbere they come from, and what their purpose is. You think they sent you to Agarthi to investigate the possihility of using our advanced weapons in a war against human suffering, but you have been pitiably naïve. And, incidentally, they no longer need your services because they have heen ahle to duplicate the ancient machines themselves. All they are after is precisely what I am determined to eliminate—*power*, vast, private power over humanity, to no one's advantage but their own!

"Now you want to return to your father, so that you can help him to further degrade himself in the name of Humanity—"

Crack! Janice shot at him, point blank. Her brain was aflame with anger and defiance. She wanted to eliminate this man who was too dangerous to live, even if it cost her her own life to do it.

But—the King only smiled at her.

"I can appreciate your vexation at this moment," he said, calmly. "It would he so much nicer, however, if tears would relieve your emotions. Still, if firing a gun helps you, why don't you fire the remaining five bul-

lets? They are only thirty-two calibre and should not harm my chair. One of your cartridges is a dud, the third one, to be exact. That makes only four to go, actually."

Janice did fire, again and again. And the third one was a dud, as the King had said. Then, with only one shot left, she looked at him suddenly in horrified amazement.

Blood oozed from his chest and soaked his robe. His eyes slowly closed and his head fell forward. He was dead.

Yet, there standing beside him, with an elbow resting casually on the back of the chair, was a perfect duplicate of himself! He was looking curiously at his image. And as he looked, the dead King vanished slowly into thin air!

Janice could not suppress a horrified scream. She tried to fire her last shot at him.

But she was paralyzed. Her hand slowly opened, and the gun floated gently to the center of the chamber. Her brain was reeling. She had not come prepared for the supernatural, if this *was* supernatural, and in all the science she had learned she had no other way of explaining what she had seen.

"Now that you have sought to take *my life*," said the King, sternly, "I am going to decide what to do with yours. You are going to do exactly as I tell you." He released her from the paralysis, but she could only sit there and stare at him.

"What you are going to do is going to be mostly for Rocky's sake. You know you can't take him back to Berlin, and you must go back because you are not wanted here. Yet, if he knew you were being driven out he would not stay with us. If he knew you would still love him, no matter where you were, he would follow you to the end of Earth, or Space, or Time. He is of the Ancient Blood. We need him here. Therefore, when the time comes I shall advise you and you will do as I tell you to do."

Janice was crying now. The King had won the battle. Even she was vanquished, utterly crushed. Her head was bent, as she was trying to hide her tears. But now she was moved to swallow her immense pride and ask for leniency, a compromise, pity, anything.

But when she raised her head to look at the King he had vanished. She rose to her feet, frightened. Only a few seconds ago she had seen him there. He could not even have reached the door in such a short length of time.

"Where are you?" she asked, while standing fearfully in the center of the room.

"I am here," he replied. The voice came hollowly, as though a giant had shouted at her from the depths of a vast cavern.

She looked through the twelve by twelve door in the wall that led into blackness, and there she saw only the King's face, glowing in bluish light, as though it were suspended in space at a vast distance from her.

"Go," he said, "and soon I shall tell you what it is you will have to do."

Janice fled from the room.

She had a sudden, overwhelming urge to run to Rocky. In the corridor outside, the young orderly informed her that Rocky had gone with Lillian Germain to the library. . . .

In spite of everything, Rocky could not help liking Agarthi. He liked it especially on this morning when Lillian led him up the cavern slope toward the recreation grounds and the library. They walked through quiet streets that were paved with well-fitted stones and lined with flowers and trees. Small private stone bungalows were often obscured by flowering vines, or vines on which grew purple grapes almost the size of plums. Occasionally, people could be seen on the rooftops gazing curiously down at them as they passed. Or women and children would pass them on the gravel walks and smile a friendly greeting.

"Doesn't anybody work here?" asked Rocky.

"Oh yes," replied Lillian, "constantly."

"Well, what do they do? And how are they paid?"

"The men work on large, community-owned farms and in factories."

"I don't see any farms or factories."

"Of course you don't. Agarthi City is the administrative and educational capital only. There are other caverns which are almost as large as this one. There are the farms and factories, which are connected to this cavern by the tunnels and grav sled ways."

"Grav sled ways?"

"In time you will see it all," said Lillian, smiling.

"But who pays the people for working the farms and factories?"

"There is no money here," explained Lillian. "Specialized communities of farmers trade in food to the Agarthian government in exchange for goods manufactured by other communities. Everything is organized by trade guilds. It works very nicely."

"Boy! What a busy place this must be on Saturday nights!" Rocky conjectured.

Lillian laughed heartily. "You are funny!" she said. "Unfortunately, we have no nights. Our sun is always shining."

"No kidding! I should think those Elder People would have had a little more romance in their blood. With all the other stuff they've managed to do, you'd think they would have provided themselves with moonlit nights! *Yeow!*"

They passed into the botanical gardens and he saw a beautiful young girl walking toward him without her street robe on. Not knowing about the custom of discarding it when not on the streets, he calculated that the girl with the golden hair that was coming his way was rather indecently clad. And Lillian laughed again.

"The botanical gardens," she explained, "are close to the recreation grounds. If you saw a girl in New York come from a swimming pool in a midriff bathing suit, you would think nothing of it."

"Lady, you don't *know* me! Are all the Agarthian girls that gorgeous?"

Three more scantily clad girls entered their path and brushed by them, giggling with amusement. "Judge for yourself," she answered.

Rocky turned about on the path and scratched his red head as he watched the shapely girls walk along toward the exit. "This place grows on one, doesn't it?" he remarked. "I just *love* botany! You must bring me here again sometime!"

Lillian laughed and took his hand. "Come on!" she said. "Let's get to that library!"

The library was a monument of ancient art in jade green marble, filled with three dimensional picture alcoves that gave one the illusion of living in a dream of beauty. Silence was an element one seemed to float away in. Very few people could be seen anywhere. Also, there was even a relative scarcity of books.

Lillian led Rocky to a large, long room, indirectly lighted. Its walls were lined with slots which contained metal cases of some kind. In the room, facing the walls, were two rows of peculiar looking chairs. There were electric switches and wires on the arms, and over the chairs hung large cages for one's head.

"Looks like a combination beauty parlor and automat restaurant," commented Rocky. "What is it?"

"It is the record room," she explained. "I want you to come over here and sit down, because there is something I must tell you."

When Rocky gingerly seated himself in one of the chairs, Lillian stood directly in front of him and placed both her hands on his. He looked wonderingly at her voluminous black hair and her blue-green eyes, which were searching his, and he wondered what came next.

"I like you very much, Rocky," she said. "That's why I hope you will respond favorably to this record. But before I run it I want to warn you. It may be a great mental shock."

"Why? What is it?" Rocky looked suspiciously around the room but could not see anything that looked like a record player.

"It is the mental record of my husband's experiences," she explained.

"Wait a minute! What do you mean by mental record?"

"By listening to such a record," said Lillian, "you actually seem to live another person's life."

Rocky looked at her aghast, and the way he looked made her lower her eyes and turn red. "Of course the personal parts can be deleted," she hastened to add.

"Well, where does the shock come in?" he said.

"Through the revelation of facts that you never knew before, things that will tear apart most of the concepts of religion, philosophy, history and science upon which your very reason has been founded."

"Baloney!" said Rocky. " 'Sticks and stones may break my bones,' but a mental record will never do it! And besides, I don't have to believe this stuff, do I?"

"That will be up to you. But if you tend to *believe*, which I'm warning you about, *that* is where the shock comes in, because in one jolt you will

find your life completely changed."

"Don't try to scare me," said Rocky. "Come on! Let's have this nightmare and get it over with!"

So Lillian took a record down from the wall which read: *Stephen Germain—Surgical Mutant.* She slipped the whole container into a compartment under Rocky's chair. She attached straps and metal clamps to his wrist. Then came the headpiece with its cold plates at his temples and at the nape of his neck. Lillian pressed buttons and he heard a whirring sound. Then all of a sudden his vision blurred. He called to Lillian, but he felt as though he were talking in his sleep.

The man who had sought to carve an adventure out of the world had found one now. . . .

Rocky was in the thought reading chair only twenty minutes, but during that time he lived the previous ten years of Stephen Germain's amazing life, and he also was forced to absorb the great, salient features of the Ancient Knowledge, synthesis of the outstanding events of the past fifty thousand years.

The record was divided into two parts, the first of which dealt with Germain's experiences. Rocky roamed and prospected with Germain through the Andes mountains, in Northern Chile, Western Bolivia and Southern Peru. He learned Spanish and Quichua and Aymara. Then he returned to the United States and took up an interrupted career in journalism, approximately at the time when Nicholas the First started out from New Moscow to conquer the world. He wrote flaming editorials against Nicholas the First and became world famous, finally becoming a war correspondent and a particular enemy of the Russian dictator. Then he entered the U. S. Strategic Services, after marrying Lillian, and was infiltrated into Russian occupied territory in South America, in Bolivia, disguised as a Quichua Indian. His objective was to destroy Dr. Borg's energy serum plant at Santa Cruz and steal the formula.

After a year's time, Michael Kent, Germain's best friend and a major in the U. S. Army Sixth Air Force, led a giant commando raid against Santa Cruz, just when Germain was getting close to his goal. Among volunteer nurses with the raid was Lillian. After almost meeting with success, in a terrific hattle the tahles were turned suddenly hy the Russian Major Sergeyev Pavlovich, and they were all captured.

Nicholas the First had chanced to come to Santa Cruz to survey Dr. Borg's work when the raid took place. Highly angered at Germain because of his notorious editorials against him, Nicholas ordered Borg to use Germain as a guinea pig in an experiment Borg wanted to make in surgical mutation of the human brain, the ohject heing to create a mental superman, whom he wanted to use to help him solve certain vital scientific prohlems.

The operation was so successful that Germain's mind became powerful enough to put the entire camp to sleep while the American prisoners

were rescued, including his wife and Michael Kent, who now had a withered left arm due to a glancing shot from Sergeyev's deathray.

But Borg and Nicholas kept Germain under hypnosis, trying to use his subconscious mind to help solve the problem of interplanetary flight. They succeeded and Nicholas and Pavlovich took the completed plans of Germain's space ship and headed for Nicholas' factories behind the Urals. Borg had also disappeared, apparently with the intention of huilding his own version of the ship. Just as Germain was about to be killed, Agarthi rescued him by means of teletransportation. While in Agarthi, Germain projected his ego outward into intergalactic space to find the Elder People. They responded to his call and helped the Agarthians to end the war.

The Elder People told all peoples of the Earth that in one year Agarthi would take over world government, because Man had failed to abstain from warfare and destruction.

Nicholas and Pavlovich and a few associates escaped in the ship which Germain's subconscious mind had built. Before leaving Earth they had tried to bombard Agarthi with atomic bombs, but the Elder People intervened. Now no one knew what their fate might be.

Dr. Borg repented and came to Agarthi of his own free will to offer his services . . .

The second part of the record consisted of a mental journey, as taken by all Agarthian neophytes, through the Seven Towers of Truth. This was the part where the "shock" was involved. Here Rocky's mind was forced to absorb the following:

1. The planet, Earth, has been inhabitable for over 800,000 years.

2. Our written history only covers about one percent of that time.

3. Much transpired before the Flood which we only regard as parable and legend but which actually happened and is true.

4. Man is capable of progressing so far that he can become like a god, defying space, time, and death itself. If this can happen in the future, then it also must have happened in the past, because time and space and hence the probabilities are infinite.

5. In the universe, suns die and are born. Dying suns fill surrounding space with radioactive particles, causing a gradual shortening of life span until all is death. New suns fill surrounding space with constructive energy, so that all life forms grow and expand and are deathless.

6. Races of men *elsewhere* have often learned how to follow the tides of constructive energy throughout the universe and live on planets whose suns are young. Thus, such people could live practically forever. They acquire such wisdom as to live at last like gods. And because of the deathless growth of eternal youth they become gigantic. (Example: The Sequoia trees are the oldest living things on Earth; and they are also the largest—author.)

7. Fifty thousand years ago, a race of these super beings, the Elder People, landed on Earth, seeking the

youth-giving rays of our sun which were then completely constructive. Proofs of this latter fact is also evidenced by the great carboniferous forests of earlier times and the giant animals of the Saurian age.

8. In comparison to indigenous humans on Earth, these beings were gods. From that period grew up the racial legends which surface Man has preserved in what he calls mythology. Wotan, Thor and Zeus were real. They were super beings equipped with a science which was looked upon by the people of those times as miraculous. Hence, the "thunderbolt of Thor," which was a destructive ray generated on scientific principles, the "Battle of the Titans," which was a war between these beings and others who wished also to live on the Earth. The Colossus of Rhodes was but an attempt to represent and preserve the memory of the "Ancient Folk."

9. A solar cataclysm was foreseen, in which the Earth would tip on its axis. Hence the Flood, caused by the seas rising over the land due to inertia when the Earth wobbled, and the end of eternal spring (Paradise) and the beginning of the seasons on Earth. The rainbow is but the sign of early death for Man now, because it is the spectrum of elements in the atmosphere which slow down life's regenerative processes in the bodily cells and cause X-rays in our atmosphere (Cosmic ray bombardment of air molecules) the cumulative effect of which is early sterility. Also, because the Earth was sent wobbling on its axis by the passage of an unwelcome celestial body through the solar system, the planet's magnetic pole was separated from the geographical pole and has been seeking it ever since. And the Earth still wobbles, as may be seen in time exposures of the North Star.

10. Preceding this cataclysm, some of these superior beings wished to journey outward again, but others were tired of traveling. They sought to live deep under ground and provide, through atomic energy extracted from the hydrogen in water, their own beneficial energy rays. So some left the Earth, and some remained.

11. These few who remained in the deep caverns (the biblical Pit) were the "fallen angels." (Rocky learned how Hell was developed out of that situation.)

12. Before and after the great cataclysm of the Flood, the underground godbeings (giants *IN* the Earth) "looked upon the daughters of men," and intermarried with the human race, taking their brides with them into the then better world below.

13. But this in itself was degeneracy. The god-race lost much of its stature, its purity and intelligence.

14. Godliness in these beings became fiendishness. They lived only for destruction and the perverted pleasure of tormenting others. This, in itself, was a narcotic which fed their decaying senses.

15. They tortured human beings for ages, stole women for use as slaves, made people go insane, produced epidemics, accidents and warfare. The nefarious "assistance" they gave to those who cooperated with

them came to be known variously as black magic, witchcraft, voodooism, and spiritualism.

16. In 1971, the Agarthians and the Elder People utterly destroyed, all devils. The Elder People told the world that Agarthi would take over world government by 1972 . . .

When Rocky came out of his sleep, he was glistening with perspiration. His face was pale. Lillian looked at him anxiously.

"Are you all right?" she said.

He only looked at her. He shook his head once, as though to clear his brain.

"Come!" she said. "What you need is a quiet place where you can sit down and think it over. And mayhe a cool glass of *colal.*"

The quiet place she had in mind consisted of a vine-clad circular wall completely enclosing a beautiful, ancient swimming pool. Lily pads drifted on the pool's surface, for in some places it was quite shallow. Grass grew between rocks along its edge, and in some places flowers tried to dip their faces in the water. On either side of a large dressing bench were ancient, full length mirrors made of an imperishahle metal. Ahove, great trees sprayed their leafy branches across the cavern's "sky."

Here Rocky slumped on the bench and took up a stem of grass to chew on. He looked at the stuhs of fingers of his left hand, then at the pool. He said nothing.

"You stay right here," said Lillian, "and I'll go get the *colal.*" She went out through a doorway that was only ten feet from him.

As she was returning from one of the recreation buildings with a tray and two glasses and a small pitcher of *colal,* she saw Janice. Both women stopped on the garden path and looked at each other for one brief moment. Lillian knew that Janice had finished her ordeal with the King, and she saw by the girl's expression that it had not been a pleasant one.

"You are looking for Rocky?" she asked. "I'm afraid he's trying to recover from a mental shock. He's in there." She indicated the door in the wall of the swimming pool enclosure. "Maybe you'd better take this in to him. You can do more for him than I can." She handed the tray to Janice.

"What is this?" said Janice, taking the tray.

"It is the only beverage available in Agarthi that gives one a *lift.* He needs one, Janice. I'll see you later!"

"Thank you, Lillian," Janice said. She stood there looking at the other girl as she walked away from her.

Then she finally turned and entered the swimming pool enclosure . . .

She saw Rocky sitting there with his head bowed, looking at the grass-grown crevices between the rocks at his feet. He did not look up. Before she went to him she thought: I'm not staying here in Agarthi, but I can't take him with me. If he knew how much I really cared, he'd follow me, like the King said, to the end of Earth, or Space, or Time. But he would not be happy because of my work, which comes before my own personal happiness. So I've got to

leave him here, got to break it off some way, before we get too far with each other.

But even as she walked toward him she doubted that she could find sufficient will power within herself to do it. Her love for him was like a forbidden fruit, a narcotic which she needed, yet which could do harm. Or was the simile in reverse? Was *she* the fatal drug that would damage *him?*

As she set the tray of *colal* on the ground, Rocky looked up at her.

"Janice!" he exclaimed, grasping her hand and pulling her to his side. "My God, am I glad to see you!"

"Are you?" she said, studying his brown eyes intently. "What happened, Rocky? I saw Lillian outside. She said you've been through quite an ordeal."

"I wish I was as dumb as I sometimes act," Rocky said. "Then what I've experienced wouldn't mean so much. But the thing's gone under my skin. I'm allergic to it!"

"To what?"

"I've had a dose of what they call the Ancient Knowledge," he replied.

"You mean about the true history of Earth, the Elder Race and so forth?"

Rocky looked at her in amazement. "You know about all that stuff, too?"

Janice nodded. "My father raised me on it. He is a great scholar."

Rocky grasped her arm in desperation. "Then tell me — what's your opinion of it all?"

"It's quite true," she said. And her eyes momentarily glanced up at the cavern's roof. "The evidence of it is all around us now. Ignorant people of the past considered the ancient ones as workers of miracles, but there are no such things as miracles. All effects have a cause. Those apparently miraculous people of the past were only superior humans who were masters of such a high type of science that they appeared to be magic." She thought of her recent experience with the King and wondered how everything he did could be explained purely on a scientific basis.

Rocky's eyes were shining with a fabulous vision of the future. "But, ye gods, Janice!" he exclaimed. "If all this is true, and if everything I've heard about Agarthi is true, then we've struck the jackpot! This is the end of the rainbow, baby! Think of it! Extended life, the termination of war on Earth, space ships, the exploration of other worlds! This is what I've really been looking for even though I told myself I was a fool because such things were impossible! But here it is! I want to stay here, Janice. Could you forget about your German friends if I asked you to marry me and stay?"

Janice could not help it. Her eyes went wet and she threw her arms around his neck. "Oh Rocky, don't say it!" she cried.

He kissed her. "What's the matter, baby?" he asked, looking closely at her face. "Say! You've been through something yourself! Here I am blabbing all over the place about my own problems and I didn't even ask you what the King said! Here!" he exclaimed, reaching for the tray of *colal*. "Let's try this stuff." He pour-

ed the glasses full and handed Janice one.

Silently, they both sipped the purplish fluid, testily. Then they looked at each other and drank again. It was only slightly sweet and had an indefinahle musty taste to it, hut there was some essence in it which swam directly to the hrain. The effect was a general exhilaration, a lift of the spirit, an increased sensitivity to everything—to the heauty of their surroundings, the halminess of the scented air, the stillness of the idyllic pool in front of them — and their warm attraction for each other.

"How was the old huzzard?" asked Rocky, after draining his glass.

"Who?"

"The King! Who else?"

"Not so old, in fact young, physically, and taller than yourself."

"No kidding! What did he have to say? What was the verdict?"

"Oh Rocky, kiss me and shut up!"

Two empty glasses rolled on the ground. Two pairs of arms intertwined, and lips fresh with the stimulus of the *colal* were pressed tightly together. Through Janice's huzzing head went a faint, distant cry: This will only make the end more difficult! Stop now before it is too late! But she only clung the more fiercely to him and responded to his hungering tenderness.

Rocky looked down at the empty *colal* pitcher. "That stuff's not had," he said. "Would you like some more?"

Her hlue-green eyes were heavy lidded due to the dreaminess induced hy the *colal*. Her hlazing coppery hair fluffed out around her and over her shoulders, her face aglow with the fever that had possessed them.

"Not a bad idea," she said.

"Don't go away, honey!" he said to her, picking up the tray. "I'll find out where they get this stuff if I have to learn the Agarthian language!"

When he had gone, Janice hit her lip. Wrong! Wrong! She had to clear her head, get it over with, tell him it was all over between them.

Suddenly, she fixed her eyes on the pool. That was it! A swim might clear her head. The atmosphere was slightly tropical and she was too warm.

In less than a minute she had her clothes off and was in the pool up to her neck among the lily pads. It was heavenly cool and refreshing. Immediately, her head hegan to clear and her thoughts hegan to dominate her emotions. She would tell him! She made that thought stick in her mind.

Yet she could not help musing what it would be like to accept Rocky's proposal, to stay here in this heavenly place and he his wife, to remain young, and passionate, heautiful and fruitful for more than a century to come!

She came out of the pool then and tried to dry herself. She looked at her image which was reflected in the full-length metal mirror at her side. Critically, for a moment, she surveyed herself. She fluffed out her hair and it fell six inches below her

shoulders. She twisted about and looked over her shoulder into the mirror at her straight, slim back and the full, soft curves of her naked body. She turned again and followed the lines her white arms made, the young, full lines of her breasts, the cool, pure whiteness of her thighs, the delicate turn of her calves and ankles.

It would be sad, she thought, to grow old. Why was it that beauty, like all things, must come and go, like a season in flower, like the flow and ebb of the tides,—

Then, in a sudden dream reality which seemed to choke her with a red fever of mortification, she realized that Rocky had come back. She only had a fraction of a second to snatch her robe up in her hands before she found herself inescapably bound in his arms. She was dimly aware, in her overwhelming confusion, that she was instinctively struggling and crying out his name. Then, slowly, her consciousness flooded back and she was aware of what he was saying to her.

"Sweetheart, you can call this fate or anything you like, but this is our answer! You can make of it something beautiful—or otherwise, as you like, but I love you, kid! This is it! Marry me! Yes or no?"

He still held her tightly. A spark of instinctive resistance jerked through her for a moment. But then she found her lips against his. Reason, inhibition and other scattered forces of resistance fought almost futilely against overwhelming responsiveness.

She found herself teetering on the threshold of that which every woman sought in life; she had found her man and she knew he had found his woman. There could be no denying this wild, tumultuous sense of conviction between them which had suddenly brought the depths of being fiercely and flamingly alive. He was right. This was it! Beyond that threshold loomed the shining pinnacle of personal happiness.

But suddenly she turned from him and finished wrapping her robe around her. Rocky would never in his life forget the beauty of her face or the terrifying extremes of ecstasy and despair he saw there when she turned back to him and exclaimed, "Rocky! It isn't for us! There is something between us that will never let it be! Don't ask me what. I can't marry you, or stay here, or—or ever see you again!"

He thought for a moment that she was going to faint, and he was not sure that he was not going to do the same. If the mental record had been a shock, this was a steamroller! He could only stand there with his mouth open as she put her sandals on and ran from the place. And he heard the sound of her crying as she ran through the gardens.

"Janice!" he shouted. "Janice!" But when he ran out into the garden he could no longer hear her running feet, and he did not know which direction she had taken. He sat down on a stone bench and stared into space.

Janice ran blindly, not knowing

what direction she was taking. Through her mind ran a line from an old poem by Grillparzer: *Wir glühten, aber wir schmolzen nicht!* (We glowed, but we melted not). And she ran sobbing through wilder and stranger pathways, crying half-aloud to herself, "Wir schmolzen nicht! Wir schmolzen nicht!"

When she was finally able to examine her surroundings she stopped running. In fact, for a moment she stood still in the pathway. She had not known such a strange place existed in Agarthi. She was in a curious tunnel. It twisted and curved upward into bluish light. Its walls were damp with moisture. Giant ferns grew along the sides of the footpath. Ahead, she heard the sound of a small waterfall.

As though in a dream, but with her heart still pounding, she entered a large grotto that was filled with the strange, bluish light. At her feet was a dark, swirling pool of water. Across to her left a small cataract splashed over rocks into the pool. Vines grew on the rocks, bearing huge bunches of purple grapes.

And there on a giant rock, across the small pool, sat the King of the World, but certainly not as she had seen him before. Here he wore only a lion's skin about his loins, and the rest of his superhumanly beautiful, herculean body glistened radiantly in the strange light of the place. He was sitting there casually, leaning back on one titanic elbow and eating grapes in an abandoned, pagan sort of way. His huge mass of curly golden hair was like a crown above his noble head, but those great eyes and those centaurian nostrils were more inhuman than ever as he smiled a greeting at her.

"Where am I?" she said. "Please! Take me out of here! Let me leave Agarthi at once!"

"You have given me a very pleasant surprise," he replied, while taking in her awakened beauty with a fatherly candor. "Beneath the fair bosom of the sorceress with her ulterior motives there lives a woman who is capable of real love—the warm and consuming love for a man. This speaks well for you, Irma. It means I am not going to have to tell you to do anything but be yourself. Remember the Greek saying: *To thine own self be true.* If you continue that way, I can promise you that you will see him again. There is a goodness in you, but first you must learn to see. So go back to Berlin and do whatever you wish. But if you are true to that beautiful thing which I saw flaming in your heart today, you will find him again . . ."

Lillian Germain found Janice asleep in a rose arbor near the Library. She took her to her own home. That night, a message came to Lillian Germain from the King, and as a consequence Janice was made ready for a journey. In fact, there was more to this "preparation" than Janice was aware of. After she went to sleep that night she knew nothing of being transported to the surgical laboratory, or of the tiny mechanism which Dr. Borg sealed inside the hone of her skull. It had been a somewhat larger mechanism.

but he had reduced its size in the Relative Densifier. Accelerated cell regeneration and healing covered up the incision completely in a matter of hours and upon awakening she felt and suspected nothing.

Early the following morning she was whizzing through deep tunnels on a grav sled toward Nepal. From there she was transported in the Prime Minister's private plane to Calcutta, where a new wardrobe and a jet-plane reservation to Berlin were waiting for her.

None of which Rocky knew. To him, she disappeared over night. His numerous questions were always answered with the same words: "She has gone home."

Rocky was so dissatisfied with the lack of adequate information regarding Janice's disappearance that he demanded an audience with the King. And the King granted him audience.

When Rocky saw the golden haired King of the World sitting on his spectacular, black onyx throne, as though in a universe of stars, he knew at once that he was no pretender. He sensed the other world power about him and knew that he was not ordinary. As he put it to Germain on the side, "He can have my vote any day."

"Janice left us," explained the King, "because she wished to return home. We gave her free transportation. There is nothing more to tell."

Rocky thought bitterly and hard for a long time. Then he looked at Germain, who was with him, and back at the King.

"Okay," he said. "Mr. Germain said you could use me around here. Give me the works! I won't kick about anything as long as I can work and sweat and fight! Plenty of action. But first of all, I want to see one of those space ships you Agarthians are supposed to have. After I see that, I'll believe anything!"

The King smiled at Germain and Germain looked at Rocky and said, "We can begin your indoctrination at once. In fact, there is no time to be lost."

It was in the administration library of the palace that Rocky read the mental record of one of the Elders who was working on the great Agarthian plan of world organization, in accordance with the King's Utopian concepts. But this was a special type of record in that it gave a tremendous perspective of the future of the world during the coming century, while under Agarthian guidance.

Through Rocky's wonder-struck mind passed vistas of the world he knew which could not be changed in a day or year or a decade, due to the fundamental law of inertia, but which was changed in time, gradually, subtly, inexorably, into a universal organization in which a sort of technology without regimentation gradually established the system of production for use rather than for profit, through a process of creating larger and larger social enterprises, called Socialism of the Age of Power.

Upward trends in population were curbed mostly by means of vigorous and far reaching programs of educa-

tion for the lowest classes of humanity, the result of which brought about voluntary birth control. A gradual redistribution of population was effected by means of vast, standardized, super-modern farming and industrial encampments for immigrants on the frontiers of the world, which proved to be self-paying enterprises.

Capitalism was not to be completely eliminated for many decades, however, again owing to the basic law of inertia, so as a temporary aid to world commerce under capitalism, a date was fixed throughout the world for the adoption of a universal medium of exchange, the dollar, based on the gold standard with the gold ounce selling at seventy dollars. This was accompanied hy a universal bank pool, universal social insurance, universal education backed hy government subsidies, the adoption of a universal, artificial, auxiliary language, international distribution of nutritive materials and the establishment of huge scientific foundations for the exclusive study of nutrition and methods of extending human life.

Other industrial, technical projects served to expand and perfect the use of the Ancient Science especially in the application of atomic energy to the work of Man, thus making unlimited power practically free and universal. Peace and Security were guaranteed by a World Government center of armed force of undisputable power.

Even a new, international concept of religion evolved, because through wise legislation religious freedom was only restricted by laws which prohibited the existence of any cult whose practices were harmful to the majority of people; for if superstitious factions among the ignorant created susceptihility to disease or social stagnation, World Government educators moved in with a streamlined concept of God and religion. Regardless of Agarthian Mentalist concepts, Agarthians knew that faith and religion were tremendous balancing factors in human society, and although certain religious doctrines were shaken to the roots hy the revelation of the true history of the Earth, religion actually had a better place in the world than before Agarthi took over, because people understood it better, saw its purpose more clearly, and felt closer to it. The average man had not yet advanced into the Mental Stage of his development, so he followed a new, modern religion and adopted a hrand new attitude toward God which established a renaissance of mysticism, that is, a new-found personal closeness to the Creator.

There was much more in the record. Rocky was just catching sight of a future Utopia arising out of the New Millenium, where the machine was Man's slave, where Man reproduced less hut lived longer, in Wisdom and Peace and Progress—when Germain shut off the machine.

"Hey, that's not fair!" said Rocky, coming out from under the effects of the record. "I was just getting started!"

"You have seen enough to be convinced of the possihilities," said Germain. "To achieve even these things, some very serious problems of the

present moment must be solved."

"In that record," said Rocky, "the gold standard was mentioned, and it said that the gold ounce would be stabilized at seventy dollars. I'm glad to hear gold is not going to lose its monetary value for a good number of years to come, because I have a gold mine."

"Is that so?" said Germain, strangely interested. "Where is it located, in the States?"

"It's out there on the South edge of the Gobi desert! I've got a map right with me that shows the location."

"It was reported by the Chief Telepathy Operator that you had made such a discovery, "replied Germain, "but we felt it was your legitimate property and did not wish to mention it. However, now that you have opened the subject, what do you intend to do with your mine? Am I correct in understanding that it yields about one kilo of 100 fine per ton?"

"Boy! You guys sure get around! Yes, that's correct. Why? Is Agarthi interested?"

"Unfortunately, the gold question is one of our most difficult problems. Now that we are preparing to establish contacts with the outside world we are going to have to have money and credit backing. We were negotiating a sort of capital loan arrangement with Nepal, but that source is not going to he nearly sufficient. Your mine, however, might be just the thing. We could go to such a lonely place as the Gobi in our space ships and work the mine."

"Well, I say there's hundreds of millions of dollars worth in the mine if there is a gram," said Rocky.

"Agarthi needs that mine," said Germain. "How much or *what* do you want for it?"

Rocky grinned. "I want," he said, "a lifetime of fightin' adventure and glory! And I want a free trip to Mars and back, sometime within the next couple of years."

"Sold!" said Germain, immediately.

"Then the mine is yours."

"That may solve one problem, at least partially," said Germain, "and it is quite a serious problem, this financial business. But there are others, graver still."

"For instance?"

"In the United States and other countries there have always been groups of people, gangsters, racketeers, and unscrupulous heads of certain business cartels. Now that the war is over, these people are losing no time in getting their hands on the reins. That is one of the most dangerous situations we will have to face. Such people do not want to relinquish their illegitimate, self-serving powers over the common man, and given a free hand with the new machines they would soon complete their work of enslaving the human race."

"How is the fight getting along?"

"There has been a considerable struggle, particularly in New York and Chicago, Pittshurgh, Detroit, London and Paris, but on the other hand we have established valuable contacts with peoples who were spared hy the Elder Race."

"Oh yes, I remember from reading

your own mental record."

"They are coming over onto our side, from the States, Mexico, Canada, Ireland, Norway, and many other parts."

"This is really getting built up!" enthused Rocky. "How many Agarthians and surface people have been rounded up?"

"Not many, unfortunately. We number, all told, around two hundred thousand."

"Two hundred thousand against the world," mused Rocky. "Kind of a handicap."

"We are not exactly against the *world*, as you put it, but rather against certain key factions who are in a position to influence people wrongly when otherwise they might accept our plan. Our greatest battle is going to be with a group of very powerful individuals called the *Nameless Ones*, who even now control the world through international trade cartels. Most damaging of all, they have accumulated a very formidable arsenal of the best ancient weapons. Still worse, all this is backed up by unusual political and scientific genius."

Rocky's mind skyrocketed back to the episode with Janice in the abandoned radar station. He remembered particularly one thing she had said: "They don't want me to go to Agarthi —want me to keep out! They say it would *endanger their cause* for me to go there now."

Rocky's ruddy, freckled complexion paled slightly as he asked Germain a pertinent question. "Where is this outfit located?"

"In Berlin," said Germain, casually. "That will be our next major objective. A new group of volunteers is coming from America, ex war pilots and adventurers who can't adjust themselves yet to civil life. My old war buddy, an ex major in the U. S. Army Air Force, Mike Kent, is gathering them up. They're going to be a tough bunch to train, but I am going to educate you rapidly, by means of mental records, to lead them. You like a fight, Rocky, and adventure. Do you realize what you're going to find with these commandos of yours? Treasures — jewels unheard of on Earth, coming from distant planets; valuable machines, weapons and space ships. I envy you the task, because I can't go with you."

While Germain was talking, Rocky's mind was swirling. He was thinking about Janice. Suddenly, two and two finally clashed together, and the result was like an explosion. *Janice was a spy for these Nameless Ones—an enemy to Agarthi!*

That night, on the roof of his house, he walked back and forth and thought harder than he had ever thought before. Suddenly, he stopped and swatted his left plam with his right fist. "I've got it!" he exclaimed. "She *couldn't* be guilty! She said her father raised her on this stuff. I'll bet he spent half a lifetime pulling the wool over her eyes, too! God, if I could only find her *now!* That's the only thing that stands between us—her old man and these Nameless Ones! She's blind! Faithful to a wrong cause! They even said they

didn't need her anymore — to stay away from Agarthi. Maybe now they know she's been to Agarthi she'll even be in *danger!*" He thanked his lucky stars that the first objective to he assigned to him was going to be Berlin. He wished the Agarthians could know how really anxious he was, personally, to clean up that Berlin hunch —and find Janice!

But he did not know that at least one Agarthian already knew. In the darkness of an immeasurable abyss a hluish face with large black eyes and centaurian nostrils smiled in satisfaction . . . THE END

Don't miss COLOSSUS II, *July issue.*

DESTINATION MOON

By FORREST J. ACKERMAN

I AM *the first fan to have set foot on the Moon!* And I want to share the thrill with you readers of OTHER WORLDS.

On 7 December 1949—eight years after the atomic homhing that resulted in the release of the energy that made a rocket to the Moon reasonable—I stepped onto the surface of our nearest neighbor. Within the crater Harpalus, high on the forehead of the man in the Moon, I stood and gazed in awe at the jagged mountain ranges that scraped the jet of space. A voice behind me said: "Careful you don't leave any tracks," and I awoke from my reverie to realize that I was still hreathing (I had almost stopped, out of wonder) and that the voice I heard was supported by an atmosphere.

The voice was that of Rohert A. Heinlein, Guest of Honor at the 3d World Science Fiction Convention, author of "Rocket Ship *Galileo.*" The place was not the northern latitude of Luna hut in Southern California. To be exact, I was on sound stage No. 1 of General Service Studios, where DESTINATION MOON (adapted from the aforementioned hook) is heing rushed to completion.

"We want to release the picture as soon as possihle," explained the author, "to keep ahead of reality."

DESTINATION MOON chronicles the course of things to come—in technicolor! In its 82 marvel-packed minutes it will detail with documentary clarity tbe prophetic 240,000 mile journey of the first manned projectile to reach our satellite.

In a 150 foot rocket, 4 men fly at 7 miles a second heyond Earth's gravity on a Hohmann orbit to the Moon. They are: Dr. Charles Cargraves, leading atomic physicist of the near future; General Thayer, military rocket enthusiast; Jim Barnes, foresighted industrialist; and Joe Sweeney, a radio-radar technician. Broadway stage actor Warner Anderson (who plays Dr. Cargraves), when interviewed on the set declared, "I'd leave for the Moon tomorrow if a real rocket was ready—and if my wife would let me!"

The production of DESTINATION MOON has been extrapolated *á la* Willy Ley, to give the most authentic prediction possihle of the greatest exploratory trip since Columhus discovered America. Chesley Bonestell, the astronomical artist whose genius has made the hook "Tbe Conquest of Space" a must with science fictioneers, has designed the lunar landscape with the meticulosity for which he is justly famous. Irving Pichel, who once starred in "Dracula's Daughter," is directing tbe film with utmost realism. George Pal, the producer, keeps a proprietory eye on the production to make certain that no Buckrogerish or fantastic element creeps in. It is heing filmed as a serious, sober effort, and as such is certain to he welcomed and applauded by the science fiction fans of the world.

The eyes of the world are on DESTINATION MOON. The day I visited the set, William Cameron Mendies, the man who

(Concluded on page 155)

EDMUND LATIMER'S MILKING MACHINE

By MILLEN COOKE

Edmund invented a milking machine that was perfection in itself, except for one flaw. Milk went in, but never came out. But then a strange man showed up who seemed to think Edmund had done something quite marvelous.

EDMUND LATIMER was neither a famed nor a brilliant man. He worked hard all day long on his father's farm, and in the evenings he did what he called his "inventing." It is not on record that he ever invented a single machine that was useful for its intended purpose, although his failures in that direction did not come from want of trying. He filled the lives of his family with gadgets, some simple, others terrifying in their unexpected performance. There was always an unpredicted factor in their operation, and it was this undependable quality that made people shy away from them, and Edmund Latimer.

The milking machine that Edmund invented was his biggest idea. It was a lovely milking machine, perfect in every detail, silent and efficient in its operation. There was only one thing wrong with it. No milk ever came out. He attached it carefully to cow after cow, and it performed its duties with ease, skill and speed, as far as the cows were concerned, and that was that. The cows remained calm and placid, but Edmund's father did not. He deplored the absence of the milk and forbade Edmund any further happy evenings of invention, concluding with much noise and shouting that Edmund was a fool and could turn his hand to more useful doings in his spare time.

So Edmund spent his evenings hewing out axe-handles and thinking. Nobody, it seemed, could ever stop the flow of Edmund's thought, even if, like the milk, it flowed and flowed and simply disappeared.

Space, Edmund decided, must BE something. Like all other boys and girls of his time, he had been properly brought up to think of space as "nothing," "absence of matter," a kind of endless hole into which everything had been poured at some long forgotten date and left to rattle around as it pleased the various prod-



"You see, Edmund, it's very simple. You have somehow stumbled on the other half of the secret I have uncovered. Tell me . . ."

Illustration by Bill Terry

ucts of kinetic energy. Edmund had never heard of the fourth dimension, and that lack of knowledge, so called, helped him, although he could not know how much or in what way.

Space, he figured, had to be SOMETHING because it WAS. However much it is possible to argue with his logic, that is the way he began to think about it. Edmund had heard of atoms, naturally, and his world was made up of electrons and protons, neutrons, and the rest of the tribe of particular explanations the Scientists had devised to make knowable the universal truths. So he conceived of Space as a something in which atoms could be swallowed up

and lost, under certain conditions. Usually, of course, that didn't happen. Space, be reasoned, kept the atoms apart in some marvelous manner beyond his comprehension, except under certain conditions which be wished he knew more about. Conditions created, without a doubt, somewhere in the workings of his milking machine.

Edmund had thought out the principle of the Viscosity of Space, but of course he did not call it that. He did not call it anything, he just thought about it.

It was only a half-thought from that point to the idea of moving Space. Edmund nearly went crazy over that one. How could something between all the atoms be manipulated by something else that consisted of atoms. Then, one day, he fed the chickens and got the answer.

Some of the chicken feed fell into the water basin. Edmund noticed how it stirred up the water, made eddies in it, and caused ripples to lap the edges of the dish. He dropped more of the feed into the water, making motions with his hand as be did so, giving the falling grains direction and varying their speed. He used up almost all the grain in the feed can, exploring the possibilities inherent in this combination of finely divided, active matter in a fluid medium. He observed the agitation of the medium.

His mother was even more agitated. She was thoroughly vexed, and Edmund, after delivering his explanation for his conduct, was forbidden to think, which, of course, made absolutely no impression whatever upon him.

By this time he knew that Space could flow, and like the Space he had discovered, his consciousness continued to flow and to produce thought. It was inevitable.

That summer The Man turned up. Nobody ever did get his name clearly, and when he was asked he always mumbled something that sounded different to everybody listening. Some said it was Rex, others said, no, it was Alex. About all they could agree to was that it did have an X in it somewhere, hut usually when the subject was mentioned people felt cold and began to shiver and were very willing to talk about something else.

The neighborhood decided finally that The Man had come with the harvest crew, had somehow got left over, and stayed on for the small change he could pick up helping around the farms, particularly the Latimer place. He seemed to have taken a "shine" to Edmund.

"Let me buy your milking machine," he said to Edmund.

"What for?" demanded Edmund, for his soul was practical. It was his thinking mind that made mistakes. "It won't work."

"I don't care," the man replied. "I'll take it as it is."

"No." Edmund was firm. "Latimers don't drive sharp bargains. It won't work so it's not for sale. Not even for junk. If I keep it around maybe I can figure out what's the matter with it some day. You can't have it."

The Man insisted a little and Edmund got tired of hearing him talk about the machine. It was a sore point with Edmund, and he didn't like to be reminded of it all the time. So one day when the man was pestering him, Edmund halled up one of his big fists and said:

"Now look here: I said the milking machine ain't for sale, and now even if it was for sale you couldn't buy it because I'm tired of you and your talking about it. So get out."

The Man himself was a biggish man, and he didn't seem to he scared at all hy Edmund and his fist. He just stood there, with a funny smile on his face. Then he flipped a hand up in the air and did something quick and intricate with his fingers, and Edmund fell to the ground screaming and tearing at his clothes. The Latimers heard him and ran out to help. By that time The Man was gone, and Edmund had most of his clothes hurned off.

"What did he do to you, Eddie boy?" Mrs. Latimer wailed.

"I don't know, Ma," Edmund replied hetween grunts as she applied oil to his red, sunburned-looking skin. "All I know is, I've got to find that man!"

"Well, don't fret about it son," soothed Mrs. Latimer, "The whole township is out looking for him, and I don't doubt he'll be found. I called up the State Police myself not five minutes ago."

Edmund sat up frantic. "Oh, Ma!" he was almost in tears, partly from the burning and partly from fear and frustration. "They musn't hurt him!"

Mrs. Latimer was dumfounded. Then she was annoyed. "Not hurt him, do I hear you say? And you half burned to death! Anybody would throw a match on me they'd get hurt if I could catch up with 'em, and I'm downright ashamed of any son of mine . . . "

Edmund interrupted her: "But Ma, he knows . . . " and then he caught himself. He wasn't supposed to be thinking about those things, officially.

"What does he know?" Ma Latimer demanded.

Edmund sat up straight in the bed and faced her. "He knows what I've got to find out, Ma, and I'll find him and get it out of him if it takes me all the rest of my natural life."

The whole neighhorhood and the State Police comhined never found a trace of The Man. In a week or so Edmund peeled, as if he had been sunhurned, and a week after that he packed a few things into a little old suitcase and took to the road. He sent his Mother a post-card from Salt Lake City, saying that he was hitch-hiking West, that he was all right, and that she was not to worry about him.

So Edmund dropped out of the life of the world, along with The Man, for a period of about two years. The milking machine sat among Edmunds other inventions, gathering dust in a storage loft, and holding within its complicated interior a part of the secret that Edmund wanted.

Edmund worked on a freighter that was making a leisurely tour of the

Pacific Ocean. It had been to China, and was now on its way back to San Francisco, loaded with this and that from all over the Orient. They put in at Honolulu, and nobody will ever know just what prompted Edmund to go down and tinker with the engines instead of going ashore. Very probably he was lonesome for inventing, but that's just a good guess. He never said much about it. The facts are that he went into the engine room, and undouhtedly with the consent and connivance of the personnel, he tinkered. Then he went up on deck.

The ship exploded with a resounding whump that laid down two warehouses, and destroyed an entire pier, with contents.

They fished most of Edmund, alive and perplexed hy it all, out of the waters, along with some few other survivors who happened to be in favorable positions about the ship. He stayed alive, and he recovered, in a way. For a long time he sat around a hospital in San Francisco, and recuperated, after a fashion, and all the time his thought kept flowing in that peculiar manner it had, producing ideas about Space and Matter.

He began to write. Rather, he talked a certain nurse who cared for him, into writing down what he dictated to her. There may have heen love in it, hut she was from a little university town not far from Edmund's home. When Edmund was not dictating they talked about their home state and how nice it would be to go back there, someday.

There must have been something near to love in it, because she stood up for Edmund when one of the doctors read what Edmund had been dictating and expressed his opinion that the place for Latimer was ohviously a hospital of quite another sort than the one he was inhabiting. That was insuhordination, or something, on her part, and she was dismissed at once with a sharp reprimand. Latimer went with her, with something more than permission from the doctor, and she set up a little nursing home of her own out near San Jose. She continued to take down what Edmund dictated, day after day.

"This Universe," he wrote, "is like a hottle of soda water. You have the water, and you have the gas in it. Now the water is what we call Space, and there is just so much of it: and the gas is what we call Matter, and there is just so much of that. While the cap is on the hottle, you can't see the gas, hut take the cap off, and the bubbles form. In the soda water they actually come together, but in the Universe they can never quite touch. Instead, they cluster.

"But space is always in between. Space flows through some clusters faster than it flows through others, hut it can be speeded up wherever it is flowing. A flowing of space that sustains itself is called a fire, and sometimes, in certain materials, it makes a flame.

"Space flows into some clusters easily and breaks them apart. It flows through certain atoms at a rate of speed that helps speed up the flow in other atoms, or is added to it in

a way that makes a self-sustaining flow."

Again: "There is a faster flow of space that makes no flame, and little heat. You have to slow it down in order to make fire with it. It works in all living things, hut it works best through the human hody. It is a kind of thinking, and it is what The Man used on me when he burned off my clothes."

His similies were crude and inexact. His terminology was unscientific. His concept of matter, vague and unclear. But he built with his own maimed and twisted hands a little gray metal cone through which Space flowed.

In spite of his soda-water simile, he never quite got over thinking of matter as a solid obstruction in space, like the grain in the water basin—clusters of finely divided particles. He was never really ahle to see it for what it is, the pure energy locked up in turhulent space, and working like a yeast through its mother-stuff whenever and wherever the mysterious "pressure from outside" is released, for the Great Unknowable Reason.

When Edmund decided to build something again, he sent for his milking machine. The very week it arrived, The Man appeared on the doorstep. This time he did not offer to huy the machine—he offered, instead, to help Edmund work at whatever he was going to do.

"Believe me, I am your servant, Mr. Latimer," The Man said. "I will be your hands."

Edmund had a strong natural suspicion of the Man, hut he needed help, and he also remembered that The Man knew something vital that he very much wanted to know, too, so he took him in. He ought never to have done it, that was plain from the beginning, but he did, just the same.

The very first circumstance that arose was crushing for poor Edmund. The nurse suddenly had little time to take dictation. She had other duties, and what they were must have been quite clear to Edmund, since there were no newcomers about the place except The Man. If Edmund balled up what was left of his hig fists and ordered The Man away, it never did any good. He stayed on, and he read every word that Edmund had dictated.

One day he walked into Edmund's room and said, calmly: "I've dismantled your milking machine."

Edmund was furious. He shouted at the man until he had the whole place in an uproar. Everyhody who could move out of bed came in to prevent what they thought must be murder and mayhem. There stood The Man, with Edmund bellowing at him, and the nurse, of all people, taking sides with The Man against Edmund.

When Edmund had finally shouted himself hoarse, The Man began to talk, very, very quietly, very coldly, like someone who knows he has irresistible power and excellent authority for everything he says.

"Edmund Latimer," be said, "you have caused me and my superiors an endless amount of trouhle, and largely for nothing. You have been

ohstinate, and you have been elusive. We were able to trace you here only by watching and following that milking machine of yours, and why do you suppose we were willing to go to all tbat trouble? Simply hecause you, an ignorant and utterly inconspicuous person, have stumbled upon the other half of the secret we have been searching for during a history that antedates yours over twenty thousand years. Now I have taken apart your hlasted machine. I have looked at all its parts. I have read your ravings. But, I must confess, I am still baffled."

At this point, Edmund relaxed a bit in his chair, and something like a smile twitched at the corners of his mouth.

The Man continued: "I have used every civilized means at my command to try to find out from you this one thing that I must know. Telepathy has proved to be a waste of time—your mind is 'jammed', it literally drowns itself out. I have even used all the violence allowed me in an attempt to shock you into clarity, without result. Therefore, I am about to resort to an expedient you may comprehend. Now, are you going to give me the rest of that formula, and tell me why your machine does what it does, or am I going to have to beat it out of your invalid brain with this water bottle?" He seized a decanter from a nearhy side-tahle and hrandished the thing over Edmund's head with a menacing flourish.

The nurse gave a little gasp and stood there between the two of them, paralyzed for the moment by her conflicting emotions. One of the more ahle-hodied patients made a movement toward The Man as if to take the water bottle away from him, hut a wave of that instrument in his direction, accompanied hy a grim look from The Man himself, put an end to that notion. The Man and Edmund glared at one another for what seemed like an eternity to the watchers. Then a wise-owl grin spread itself over Edmund's face and he folded his arms across bis chest. "Beat," he said, and waited.

The Man took a step or two forward, and everybody held their hreath—all except Edmund, who laughed. Then, all at once, the man laughed, too, and put down the water bottle.

"You just as good as told me a minute ago you aren't allowed to beat people," Edmund grinned.

Without a word The Man strode out of the room. He went down to the hasement and put the milking machine hack together again exactly as Edmund had huilt it. Then he gathered it up in his arms and hrought it upstairs. He planked it down at Edmund's feet as much as to say "there now," and stood back a step waiting for Edmund to say something. Edmund never moved. He didn't look at The Man. He just sat there looking out through the window, waiting, too.

Finally The Man gave in. He turned everybody out of the room with voluble assurances that everything would be all right, and that he really meant Edmund no harm, shut

the door after them all and began to talk.

He told Edmund where he had come from, and how his branch of the human family had waited and searched for what Edmund knew. He went into some detail on the subject of what it would mean to humanity, as a whole, to have the complete secret.

The Man said he would go back to wherever it was he had come from if Edmund would let him have his part of the secret. Edmund saw no harm in that. Perhaps there was none. So far there has been no cause to suppose there was. He convinced Edmund of his sincerity, and, to quote Edmund, they "tinkered together."

They took two identical parts out of the famous milking machine, and under Edmund's direction, together they made two of the little gray cones. The Man kept one, which he took away with him. Edmund gave the other one to the Nurse, and then died very abruptly and very strangely. One of the patients swore he saw The Man again the night before they found Edmund's body lying naked out in the patio, sunburn-red all over. And one of the gardeners, returning late, said he saw someone "who could have been The Man," going out the front gate with another man "who looked something like Mr. Latimer, only he was a well man and very healthy looking," but since the gardener was known to be superstitious and had just had a heavy evening in town, his testimony was disregarded.

The doctor gave the cause of death as over-exposure to the sun, but there were those, cold sober and practical minded, who observed that there had been a fog that morning. There was no sensible way to account for the body's condition, however, aside from what the doctor had said, so his opinion stood, and the weather-noticing observers were hushed up.

The nurse kept the little cone-light all her life, and willed it to the University where she had gone to school, with all Edmund's notes. Everything was thoroughly studied, but the professors couldn't make head nor tail of it, so the cone was finally set up in the main hall of the administration building as a memorial to the nurse. There it stayed for nearly a hundred years.

THE END

DESTINATION MOON *(Concluded from page 147)*

made H. G. Wells' immortal THINGS TO COME, was an interested visitor.

I inspected the complex controls of the atomic rocket, saw the hammocks in which the crew are flattened by 6 gravities, visualized how the rocketeers would float in free fall. In the projection room I saw "rushes" of 3 space-suited figures emerge from the airlock. And on Stage No. 3 I witnessed the horrifying tragedy of a man separated from his ship and floundering in the vacuum between worlds as the rocket sped through interplanetary space.

These wonders and a score of others you too will see when you are transported to another world via DESTINATION MOON.



THE SCISSORS

By
WILLIAM WALLRICH

They seemed just an ordinary pair of scissors, but when you opened and closed them, the earth itself opened—and shut.

Illustration by Mrs. William Wallrich

NO ONE will ever know exactly what happened in the kitchen of the Lopez home. There was a lot of talk around town but it was little more than that—just talk. No one really knew who had killed the Lopez girl or how, or anything else concerned with the death. The best the coroner's jury could do was to declare death at the hands of a person, or persons, unknown.

The dead girl, Marcelina, was definitely on the flashy side. Her skirts were always just a little too tight, rather becoming her kind of a figure. Although she wasn't twenty, she stayed out until well after midnight on Saturday nights drinking wine at Fat Juan's, and she didn't care a bit if her date mussed her up a little in the balcony of the Statute of Liberty "picture show." All in all, she was quite a bit of baggage and undouhtedly was a problem and constant source of shame to her parents. Many were the nights that the neighbors of the Lopez family heard the girl's parents and grandmother, who lived with them, remonstrating loudly with Marcelina when she would return home while still tipsy from too much Port after an evening out. Undouhtedly, the girl's parents used every method at their command to return the girl to good ways and a good reputation, hut all efforts failed. Months passed and Marcelina continued on her merry way and her parents', especially her Mother's shame grew hy tbe day. Naturally, a situation as intolerahle as this could not continue indefinitely and it didn't—Marcelina died violently and horrihly in the kitchen of her parents' home. When she died, there are accurate reports that her screams were heard three blocks away.

Be all that as it may, when the police arrived, (it was well after one o'clock in the morning after all of the local officers had retired for the night) Marcelina was found stuck in the kitchen floor. She had, from all appearances, been driven through the thick planks, just as one drives a shingle nail into a piece of rotten cottonwood. Only her head protruded ahove the level of the floor. Even her hair, which was shoulder length and raven hlack, had its ends hidden from sight by the planks of the floor. The head, or rather the

head and the girl attached to it, lived for thirty or forty minutes after her first horrihle screams hrought neighbors and her family to her side.

Men immediately set to work to free her. At first they hacked with their pocket knives at the flooring, but soon more efficient tools were procured and in time the wood was splintered out in a circle away from her neck. Then it was discovered that the balance of her body was driven into, at least covered up, by the earth beneath the floor. Although she was still alive during this period she never regained her senses. Several times she gasped or muttered words that those present took to mean, "The fire—oh, the clawing fire!" and *Agua, agua!"* or, "Water, water!" nothing more. She died in ohvious agony a short time after that and without benefit of the church. Oddly enough, although the priest was naturally sent for, he could not he found. The messenger who had been dispatched for the priest later said that he had searched for the good Father as one in a nightmare, and that he had not found the priest because the night had closed in on him hindering him at every step.

The day following the death of Marcelina, also the day prior to the funeral, Mrs. Lopez, the Mother, went to the village priest and made a strange confession. She told the priest that she had killed her daughter. Naturally, the priest was amazed and inquired as to why and how she had done such a thing. Mrs. Lopez replied that she had employed a pair of scissors. The priest then recognized her condition and let her have her say without further interruption. Mrs. Lopez explained what a constant source of shame Marcelina had heen to her and the rest of the Lopez family; of their attempts to correct and discipline the wayward girl; and of her decision — reached only after much thought and prayer — to do away with the girl.

She then explained that she had gone into the foothills to the north of the village and there purchased from an old, old woman an infallihle charm — a pair of age-hlackened, strangely decorated scissors. Mrs. Lopez then returned to her home and waited for her daughter to return from her nightly carousal. At length, well after midnight, the girl returned. Marcelina was drunk, but despite this her mother had remonstrated with her, once more to no avail. Marcelina started to flaunt out of the kitchen where they were talking so as to not disturh the rest of the family, who were sleeping. It was then that Mrs. Lopez employed the "scissors charm," and with it killed her daughter. As the girl started across the floor to the door, Mrs. Lopez watched her and at the same time she held the scissors hefore her, a handle in each hand. For the last time she pleaded with Marcelina to repent and to do hetter. Marcelina ignored her and continued on her way out of the kitchen, so Mrs. Lopez jerked the scissors wide open. As she did so, the floor and earth opened up heneath the feet of her daughter. As soon as the girl had fallen partially into the yawning gap, she clapped the hlades of the shears

together, and with that the earth and floor had immediately closed upon the girl.

The priest sat a moment when Mrs. Lopez had finished her bizarre tale just looking at her. Then he gently explained to her that shock was a terrihle thing, that such distorted visions come at times to the minds of those who have lost a dearly heloved one, especially if the circumstances of the death were violent. He went on to say that this was the Twentieth Century and such superstitious beliefs belonged in the dark, dead past.

With that Mrs. Lopez arose, and with a wooden face and her usual shuffling gait, left the church.

The mystery of the death of Marcelina Lopez has never been solved. Yet there is still talk of it, and people cross themselves now when they pass the Lopez home, for there are a goodly number who remember seeing a pair of scissors, dark with age and curiously fashioned and engraved, lying on the kitchen tahle in the Lopez kitchen the night the earth opened up and crushed Marcelina.

THE END

LETTERS

Ed Wood

Let me congratulate you on having one of the best SCIENCE FICTION covers in years on tbe front of the March issue. Thank heaven that there is one other magazine besides ASF that is willing to keep out of the "girlie" class. I like that spirit of freshness and advancement that you have. There's been nothing like it since the early days of FFM, when all the fans yelled and the editor obeyed. Think maybe we could get paper like you have in FATE? The stuff you have now is somewhat bulky. Everyone will have to admit that you're in there trying. Best of luck.

31 N. Aberdeen St.,
Chicago 7, Illinois.

We have a surprise cover coming up on the July issue of OTHER WORLDS. We are sticking our necks out so far as to say it is just about the best science fiction cover we have ever seen. That means it has to rank right up there with something like 1000 science fiction covers. You can judge from that how highly we think of it. It is the standard we have been aiming at, and we will try to come as close to it each issue as possible. How do you like the cover on this issue? As for the paper, it is actually a higher-priced paper than we use in FATE. Our choice is due to the fact that this type paper affords us a thicker backbone, making the magazine easier to find on the stands. Experience has shown that this is important.—Rap.

James R. Adams

You're a little behind the times, Rap. TWS and SS cut out that space lingo some issues back. They are two of the better mags in the field, hut OTHER WORLDS is already coming up fast. It could become top-dog with me in the near future, and I'll tell you why. It's not the stories; they are of ordinary quality thus far, none outstanding. Nor is it the illustrations, which are average and can't compete with the products of guys like Finlay and Lawrence-Stevens.

The covers are good—keep that black background as on the March cover (a doozy). But the thing that really makes OW a serious threat to the leading mags

is its atmosphere of democracy. Or maybe it would be better to say its *policy* of democracy. And it takes it all the way—not just down the road a piece like the other publications. Whoever heard of a magazine urging its readers to read a certain story in a competitor? I like that—even though I know, as you do, that most of them read all the mags anyway.

Keep that policy and OTHER WORLDS' future is assured.

922 N. Courtland Ave.,
Kokomo, Indiana.

As of receipt of your letter, we are very much embarrassed. And we apologize to Sam Merwin, who, we say, is the best editor in the field, outside of Campbell, and, if we may commit a heresy, Bill Hamling of Fantastic Adventures. *Sam's letter column is improved, and it was our fault for not reading it thoroughly. We judged by a single letter we glanced at. Well, we'll eat humble pie, and no shirking. Thanks for your comments on our democracy. Actually it's the readers' democracy. We're trying to make our policy fit our readers, not our readers fit our policy. Does that explain it?* —Rap.

Basil Davenport

In your March issue is a story by Henry Hasse entitled *Survival*. I wonder how many of your readers have been struck, as I was, by the remarkable resemblance it bears to *Elementals*, by the late Stephen Vincent Benet, a story which was first published about 1925 and has frequently been reprinted in anthologies. In both, there is a powerful person who believes that hunger is stronger than love; in both, he confronts a pair of young lovers with a kind of bet, with a great reward if love is stronger, and a penalty if it proves otherwise; in both, the lovers become delirious with hunger and almost fail, but win in the end. The only real difference seems to lie in the Martian and Earthly settings. The extent of this coincidence must prove that life on Mars is more like that on Earth than we had supposed.

132 East 19th Street,
New York, N. Y.

You have hit, as did both Henry Hasse and Stephen Vincent Benet, on one of the oldest plots in the history of writing. I believe, if you were to pursue a research on this subject, you'd find that the same plot had been written hundreds of times, and perhaps as far back as some of the oldest Chinese fables. It's a classic plot, we agree, and we find no objection to Hasse using it, any more than you find to Benet using it. Both of them did it well.—Rap.

Vernon L. McCain

I'll be frank about it. I thought it was the usual malarkey when you trotted out the old line about this magazine was going to be different. And while I had hopes, I didn't really expect you to make good on your promises to present stf's finest authors and to run the magazine to suit the fans.

But you're starting to make good already. Bradbury, even second-rate Bradbury like his Marionettes, Inc. series, is sign of intention to fulfil your promises. And Van Vogt, who couldn't write a really bad story if he tried, is definitely fulfilment of your promises.

Your editorial policy alone is worth the purchase price of the book. It has always seemed to me childish in the extreme to pretend all competitors do not exist, especially in an adult field like stf. The wise businessman knows there's more money to be made in splitting up a large, enthusiastic, trade between several competitors than trying to hog all of a small, apathetic market.

Due to your plug for the authors Browne is getting, I bought the current issue of *Fantastic Adventures* and discovered a truly amazing renaissance. There is a great mystery here. There must be a mutant superman among us science fiction fans who has altered both editor Palmer's and Ziff-Davis' brain patterns for the good of science fiction. Remember Asimov's Mule? Well, whatever has happened, I'm deliriously happy about it. Not only are we given a brand-new magazine which is progressing so rapidly that it looks like it might eventually be at the top of the heap; but simultaneously we see the start of the regeneration of the fans' chief peeves. If this keeps up we will soon have nothing to complain about.

Even your cover leaves very little room for complaint. However, I am unable to connect the peculiar machine in the lower right hand corner with the story. As it is out of key with the rest of the picture anyway, I feel you would have really done

a more impressive job retaining the *Astounding* part of the cover and leaving the Buck Rogers devices to the funny papers.

Your stories were greatly improved this time and as usual Rog Phillips wound up with the best story in the issue. (Yes, I know, you just put his name on the best one.)

The Fatal Technicality was a little gem in its way and while no one took it seriously, it quite definitely points a moral. Not in the conclusion of the story, which is just for laughs, but in the early part where the frustrating ultimate in regulation of laws was demonstrated. It was a perfect transfer of prison life with privileges for good behavior and punishment for the slightest infringement of rules. It is definitely something for our utopian planners to think over. So many people are willing to sacrifice freedom (especially other peoples') for such intangibles and ungettables as perfection and security. When man attains perfection he might as well commit suicide. Only a living death awaits him thereafter. I won't delve any further into politics than to quote Jefferson's "the least governed, the best governed."

Editor Palmer, I am beginning to think Richard Shaver most be related to your wife the way you push his work. The only bad story in the issue was *Lady* which was downright unreadable in spots. Please send Shaver back to the westerns or wherever he came from. I have read several of his mystery tales and this makes the third of his non-mystery stories I've seen and I've yet to see any sign of the spark necessary for good fantasy.

Of the remaining either *The Gamin* or *Live In An Orbit And Like-Love It* would have been good enough to rate tops in either of your first two issues.

c/o Western Union
Ellensburg, Wash.

Maybe we'd better explain who your mutant superman is. Actually Howard Browne and myself get together frequently to compare notes, with the view toward making each magazine outdo the other. We have adopted the idea that only by helping each other can we help science fiction. So, we are entering into a "plot" to overthrow the lackadaisical science fiction field and force it into a period of competition which cannot fail to improve it one hundred percent. Now, if this sounds like damn foolishness to any of the other publishers and editors in the field, we say, let them go to sleep at the switch—and they'll find themselves sidetracked. So, if you find a mystery here, it is a new method of competition—by helping one another. We have both watched the fans work together, building up those magnificent conventions, and we have decided what's good for the goose is good for the gander. And we are proud to note that you have found that the plot is working! Yes, Amazing *and* Fantastic *are much improved over the old "Palmer" days, and OTHER WORLDS is not suffering by comparison. Naturally, there is rivalry between Browne and myself, but it is friendly, and each delights in seeing the other score a point in the competition, and immediately sets out to try to better it. And any time any of you fans want to drop in on one of those sessions, you are welcome—it's in the coffee shop at 185 N. Wabash in Chicago. And don't miss the July issue of* Amazing Stories. *Howard knows we have a super issue of OTHER WORLDS coming up for that month, and he won't be caught asleep.*

Yes, our cover disappointed us too, when we saw it in the calm light of post-mortem. We should have left that gadget off altogether; but there you'll see some of the old Palmer policy, which is hard to shrug off in just a few months. But let July prove to you we can do it.

Rog Phillips will put you on his favorite reader list, we're sure! As for Shaver, we're making a personal issue out of it. The charge is that the Mystery carried him over, not his writing. We deny it. We say he can write stf with the best of them, and we intend to prove it. And he isn't related to our wife. How did you ever get the idea he wrote westerns and mystery? He never wrote either type.

We are delighted to see that you found two stories in the issue that could rate tops in any of our previous issues. That shows we are getting some good writers, even if we are being forced to develop some new ones.—Rap.

DID YOU MISS YOUR COPY TOO?

Due to the unexpected demand for OTHER WORLDS at the newsstands, and its increasing popularity, we are unable to anticipate local needs, and therefore many stands receive insufficient copies. You may not get future issues if you get there late. And we will be unable to get enough returns to supply mail orders for back issues. Most frequent request we receive is for the first issue, from readers who missed buying one at the newsstands because they were all sold out. We can fill a few of these orders, but before very long even our office supply of the first issue will be exhausted. For a short time, you can order it as a part of your subscription. We do not guarantee that you will receive it, since they are selling fast; but if we are out of stock, we will adjust your subscription to include additional issues. The magazine you are now reading is number four.

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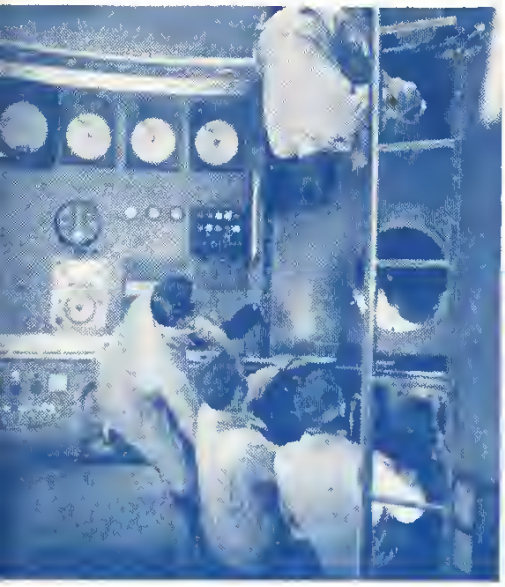
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